



ZANE GREY'S WESTERN

A Zane Grey Novel

ROGUE RIVER FEUD

(Magazine Abridgment)

THE DEVIL IN DENVER

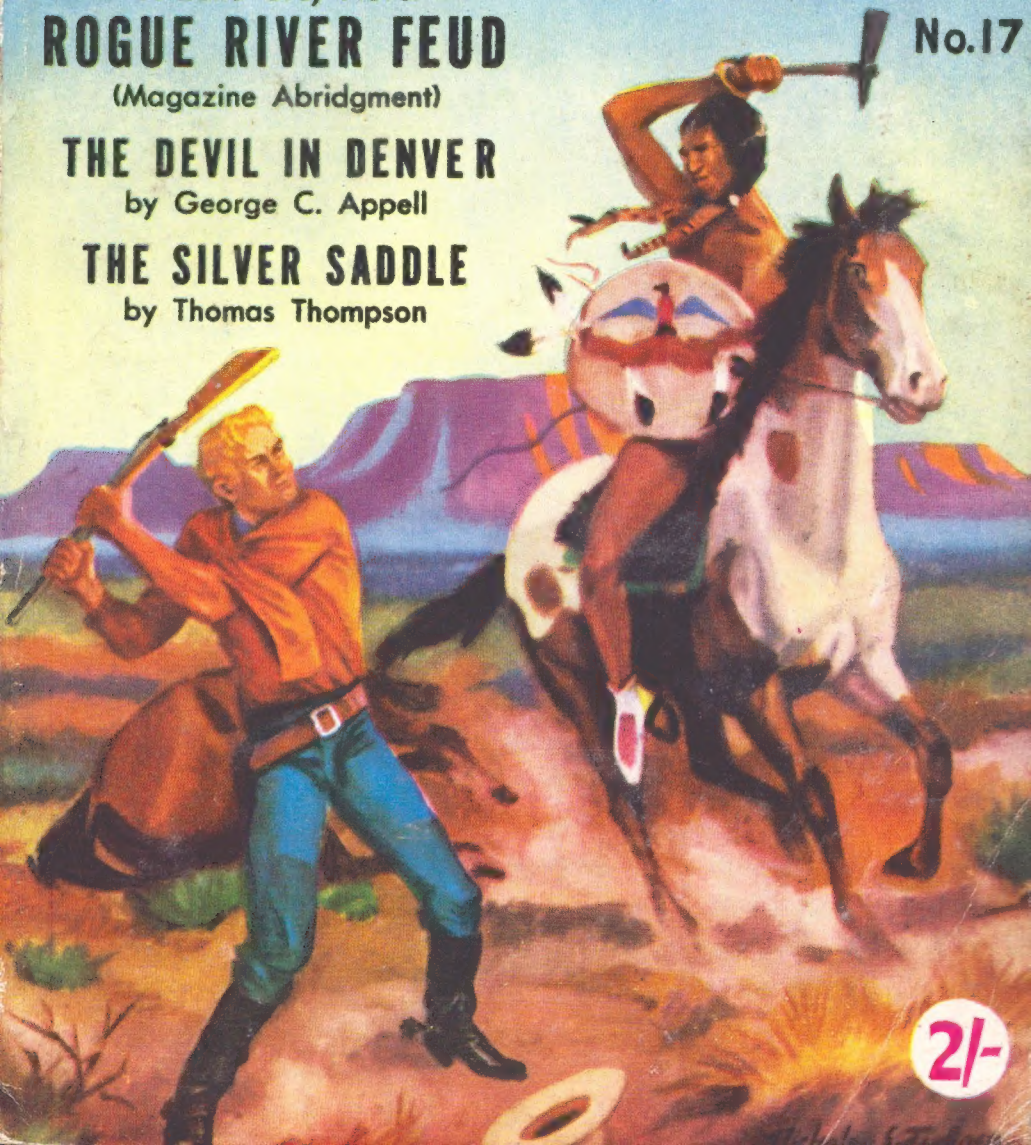
by George C. Appell

THE SILVER SADDLE

by Thomas Thompson

MAGAZINE

No. 17



2/-



"Oh, Lord!" Beryl gasped. "There's Dad!"

Rogue River Feud, Chap. 12



ZANE GREY'S WESTERN MAGAZINE

No. 17

NOVEL (magazine abridgment)

Rogue River Feud

Zane Grey 3

NOVELETTE

The Devil in Denver — *A Ross Ringler Story*

George C. Appell 146

SHORT STORIES

The Silver Saddle

Thomas Thompson 109

Ointment for Mangas

Verne Athanas 121

Samaritan

Will C. Brown 142

FACT FEATURE

Ring and a Hat

Riley Martin and Harold Preece 131

FACT FICTION

The Hanging of Injun Pete

T. J. Kerttula and D. L. McDonald 102

DEPARTMENTS

Cowboy Slangage — *A Rhymed Quiz*

S. Omar Barker 130

Published in the United Kingdom by World Distributors (Manchester) Ltd., by arrangement with Western Printing & Lithographing Company, Racine, Wisconsin, U.S.A., authorised Zane Grey Western Magazine Publishers. Printed in Great Britain at the Philips Park Press by C. Nicholls & Company Ltd.

This Month's Magazine Abridgment



KEVEN BELL, who has returned from the war partially disabled, is home at last — home to his beloved Oregon, home to the mountain wilds and the roaring, turbulent Rogue River. But things have changed; Kev's mother has passed away, his father is old and broken, his friends have turned against him on the basis of some vicious gossip. Only the Rogue is as it used to be — racing, tumbling, calling to Kev Bell with its irresistible voice. So Kev returns to the river, in partnership with a salty old-timer named Garry Lord. Garry knows every stone in the Rogue from Savage Rapids to Blossom Bar, and beyond; and the two plan to buck the packers' combine and get in a full season of salmon fishing at famed Gold Bar. They start their trip down the Rogue with the police at their heels, dodging lawman lead, battered and tossed by the boisterous river. Soon the big salmon run begins, and Kev and Garry labor mightily by day and night to make their catch. But agents of the combine crack down on the partners, and soon their boat is lost, Garry has disappeared, and Kev Bell is again a fugitive. Exhausted and desperate, Kev seeks refuge with an old trapper friend. Beryl, the trapper's beautiful and provocative daughter, makes her love for Keven clear, even though he is sought by the law. Together, they face danger squarely, until the last of their perils has passed and the road ahead lies straight and clear.

The majestic Pacific Northwest and the excitement of salmon fishing combine to make an impressive background for this stirring Zane Grey novel.

MAKE SURE OF YOUR ZANE GREY MAGAZINE EVERY MONTH

Send your subscription in now for twelve issues of this magnificent book, which includes short stories, features, and magazine abridgments of Zane Grey novels.

ALL FOR 26' - POST FREE

WORLD DISTRIBUTORS (MANCHESTER) LIMITED

14A LEVER STREET

MANCHESTER

Gentlemen,

Please send me the next twelve issues of ZANE GREY WESTERN MAGAZINE commencing with No. 18. I enclose 26/-.

NAME

ADDRESS

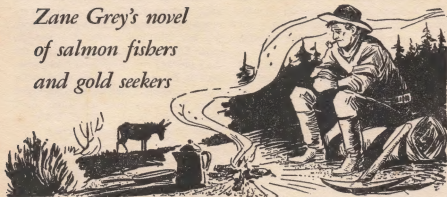
TOWN

COUNTY

If you have not read previous issues of this magazine and you require them, please send 2/- for each copy required, and they will be sent to you post free.

ROGUE RIVER FEUD

*Zane Grey's novel
of salmon fishers
and gold seekers*



CHAPTER ONE

Return to the River

KEVEN BELL, returning home to Grant's Pass after two terrible years in an army training-camp hospital, seemed to see all things strange and unfamiliar except the beloved river of his boyhood—the errant and boisterous Rogue.

He had not gone home at once, but wandered about the town, finally lingering at the river bridge. His mother had died during his four-year absence from home, and his father's last letter had acquainted him with more misfortune. His eyes smarted and dimmed with tears. How long had it been since he had cared for anything?

Surely still for Rosamond Brandeth, whom he had loved before he left home to train for war! Long since her letters had ceased—so long that he could not recall when. He meant to release her from a claim that honor, at least, held binding.

At length he turned away. He had to ask a man, who peered strangely at him, how to find his father's house. It looked old and dilapidated. He sat down on the porch.

The day was a Sunday in May. He had arrived from Seattle on the morning train. The streets appeared deserted. New houses across the common hid the banks of the river. Finally, hearing steps within, he knocked on the door. It opened.

There stood his father, greatly changed, now slight of build and stoop-shouldered, his hair gray.

"Dad, don't you know me? It's Kev."

"My son!" replied the older man, and reached for him. "I—I didn't know you! Come in."

Keven saw the sitting-room, with its open grate, where a fire burned. His father clasped his hands hard and gazed up, puzzled and anxious.

"Son, you're not the same," he said. "Taller—thin. You used to be big. And you face—"

"I couldn't write," replied Keven, a

hand going to his father's shoulder. "But you heard of my accident?"

"I think I did. Long ago, wasn't it? But I forget what. Once we thought you'd died. Then it was in the paper about your being in the army hospital. What happened to you, Kev?"

"A lot. Cannon blew up. I stopped the breechblock with my face," replied Keven. "I was pretty badly mussed up. But I didn't know anything about it for months. They thought I'd die. I was in hospitals for two years. Then I pulled through. But my mind is bad. I notice it most in not being able to remember. Can't see well out of one eye. And look here—at my iron jaw."

He drew down his lower lip, to expose the hideous thing that served for his lower maxillary.

"I lost most of my lower jaw. The dentist patched it up with iron."

"Well! Well! Sit down, son. So you never got to France?"

"No, worse luck. Four years! My health shattered—my eyesight impaired—my brain injured somehow. I'd been better if I'd gotten to the front. Four years for nothing. I suffer pain all my waking hours. And I don't sleep well. Whisky gives me relief, though. I had to come home. I'm a wreck. No money. Nothing but this uniform on my back. That's all."

"Son," said his father, "it could have been worse. You might have been killed—or have been sent to an asylum. While there's life there's hope. Kev, I implore you to have hope."

"For what, Dad?"

"That you've something left to live for," was the earnest reply. "Find it—make it! Rise above it all! The damned sordid, rotten part of the world that seems in power. The destructive forces! Don't let them kill your soul."

"I understand, Dad. I'll try. Tell me about Mother."

"Kev, she just gradually went downhill," returned Bell. "You should remember she was a sick woman before you left. She had a long, lingering illness. She was glad to go. Before she died she told me to get you back home here by the Rogue—that the river would cure you. Well, I had to take more and more time away from the store, until gradually my business failed. I lost it. Since then I've been carpentering."

"If only I had learned a trade!" sighed Keven. "But I never learned anything, except how to fish. I spent more time fishing than in school."

"Kev, you can go back to the river," said Bell thoughtfully.

"What? You don't mean fishing?"

"Yes, I do. For a living. The market fishermen do well now. Some of them own their homes. Brandeth has gotten control of the canning factory at Gold Beach. He pays big wages. He got rich during the war."

"Brandeth. You mean Rosamond's father?"

"Yes, no one else than John Brandeth. Built a magnificent new house. Has a big fruit ranch down on the river. He's in everything. And, by the way, he got my store."

"Straight or crooked, Dad?" queried Keven.

"All business is straight, since the war," replied his father evasively. "But John Brandeth could have saved me from failing."

"Dad, how about Rosamond?" returned Keven, averting his eyes.

"Grown into a beautiful young woman. She sure flies high. Drives her own car. Drinks and dances. Engaged to this high-stepper from Frisco and then

some fellow round here—so the gossip runs. She never speaks to me. Kev, you haven't any hopes, have you—about Rosamond?"

"No, indeed, Dad. But she never broke our engagement. At least I never had word of it. Was—that reported about town?"

"Lord, no, son. You've been long forgotten."

"Ah, I see."

"Forget all that, too, my son. We'll fix up your old room. And come out to the shed. I've built a new river boat. The same old model, Kev. I sell one now and then to a market fisherman. This one is spruce, twenty-one feet long, deep gunwales, sharp fore and aft, with watertight compartments. It's a dandy."

Sight of that Rogue River boat seemed to open a door in Keven's heart to let memory in. For he had known every stone in the river from Savage Rapids to Blossom Bar, and beyond.

"Dad, it's sure a dandy. Better than you used to build," Keven said heartily. "What do you charge for these boats, Dad?"

"Forty dollars to the market fishermen. They furnish oars, locks, lines."

"This one sold?"

"No. But Garry Lord has his eye on it."

"Garry Lord! Somehow that name seems familiar," returned Keven ponderingly.

"Humph, it ought to be. You used to play hooky from school to fish with Garry Lord. Garry never was any good, and now he's worse. He's grown up now. Just a lazy drunken low-down riverman!"

"Does he still live out on the edge of town, in a tumble-down shack under the pines by the river?"

"No. Brandeth bought that pine grove and the river front. He ousted Garry and the other loafers out there. Garry moved farther down the river, son."

"I'll hunt him up. Dad, here's your forty dollars for the boat. It about cleans me out."

"Son, I can't take your money."

"Yes, you can. If you don't some bootlegger will get it," replied Keven. "Is my old room available?"

"It has never been used since you went to be a soldier."

Presently Keven Bell stood on the threshold of the room where he had lived his childhood and boyhood days. And on the threshold of the dim past, where vague scenes arose like ghosts.

In the afternoon he walked out the broad avenue to the Brandeth mansion that lifted its shiny tiled red roof among the pines on a bench high above the river. The maid who answered his ring informed him that Miss Brandeth was out motoring.

Keven returned to the main street and strolled its long length, passing many persons, not one of whom he recognized. He went to the park, and from there back to the railroad station. An hour's walk on Sunday afternoon assured Keven he was not known in his home town. He ended upon the river road, from which he crossed a meadow to the pine-fringed bank.

He sat down in a shady fragrant brown-carpeted spot. Suddenly he felt the pleasantness, the welcome of the place.

The river ran clear, swift, and green over the rocky ledges. From the bend below floated a low musical roar of a rapid. It mingled with the sound of the wind in the pines. A crow cawed from the hills.

Keven closed his eyes and lay back upon the pine mat, and all these sensations seemed magically intensified. At last, rising, he strode on down the river, past the white rapid that stopped his heart with a recollection. Here as a boy he had experienced his first upset and had drifted, clinging to his skiff, through the ugly rocks and rushing channels to the safety of shallow water below.

At the end of the fringe of pines he espied a fisherman's shack, constructed of boards and stones and flattened gasoline cans, with a stovepipe sticking out of the roof. A giant pine spread wide branches down over the roof, to brush against it. Keven saw a man bending over a net which evidently he was repairing. Keven had to gaze keenly to make sure this was Garry Lord. Finally convinced, he went cautiously down the bank, in time to see Garry throw aside the old net in disgust.

"Rotten!" he ejaculated. "Rotten as the damned nettin' game itself! It ain't no use. No net—no boat. An' jail yawn—in' at me again!"

Keven stepped out.

"Hello, Garry."

The fisherman started quickly to rise and turn. He had a leathery, weather-beaten face, homely and hard, unshaven and dirty, yet somehow far from revolting. Perhaps that was due to the large, wide-open, questioning blue eyes.

"Fer the love of Mike!" he yelled suddenly. "It ain't Kev Bell?"

"Yes, it is, Garry. All that's left of him."

"But, my Gord! Last I heerd you was dead!"

"No, worse luck, I'm alive."

"Gord, I'm glad to see you, Kev."

"Dad told me where to find you,"

replied Keven. "I got home today. The old place is changed, Garry. I didn't see anyone I knew. Mother's gone—Dad's old and broken. It's tough to come home to—to all that. Well, I'm lucky to get home at all. Garry, I was at the butt end of a gun that blew up. Breechblock hit me in the face. I've a bum eye, an iron jaw, and a sunspot on my brain. Ha!"

"I heerd you'd been bunged up somethin' fierce an' was slated to cross the big river. Kev, you remember Gus Atwell?"

"Yes, I guess so. Though I can't recall his face."

"He got a major's commission."

"Oh, yes. He lorded it over us at camp. God, that seems long ago. Atwell went to France long before I was injured."

"Like hell he did," retorted Garry with contempt. "He came home. Invalided, they called it. We all called it nogutseted! Kev, he was as healthy as me."

"Is that so? News to me. I guess there'll be a lot of news."

"You said it. Kev, Atwell spread such talk about you thet it got to the ears of us fishermen."

"Gossip? What about? My accident? How near death I came—and all that time in the hospital?"

"Not on your life," snapped the riverman. "He spread a lot of rotten stuff. I can only remember one of the things. Thet was so queer no one'd ever forget it. About five girls in one family. Name Carstone. They lived near the trainin' camp. Five girls from fifteen years old up to twenty-two, an' every damn one of them had a baby. Five sisters!"

"Carstone? Five sisters? That runs in my mind somehow—not exactly strange."

"Well, Atwell said you was mixed up in thet. An' there sure was a nine-days' gabfest here at the Pass."

"Garry, it's a lie," replied Keven hotly.

"I'm right glad to hear thet, Kev," returned Garry fervently. "An' if I was you I'd face Atwell with it. Make him crawl or beat hell out of him. Us upriver fishermen sure have it in for Atwell. You see he's superintendent of the biggest cannery on the coast. Belongs to Brandeth, who's gettin' hold of everythin'. He about runs Gold Beach. Well, Atwell's gang of down-river fishermen are against us, an' we've had hell these last two years. Fights every Saturday night durin' the nettin' season. There's been two kill-in's. There's a tough crowd down the river. And they're tryin' to freeze us out."

"Don't stand for it, Garry," said Keven stoutly.

"What can we do, Kev? Why? there's only a few upriver fishermen who go down to the coast. An' they shoot the Rogue, which you ought to remember is some job. No, we're up against it. Atwell dominates the market here an' on up the river. An' at Gold Beach we have to sell to opposition canneries, none of which can afford to pay what Brandeth pays. Atwell spends as much time here as at Gold Beach. He's chasin' Brandeth's girl now."

"You mean Rosamond Brandeth?" asked Keven quietly.

"Sure. She's as swift as she's pretty—By gosh, Kev. I forgot!" exclaimed the fisherman, slapping his knee. "You used to be sweet on her."

"Yes, I remember, Garry. But let's talk fish. When does the season open?"

"Open now. But there's no run yet. If I had a boat an' a net I'd take

another try at Gold Beach, if only to spite Atwell. Kev, I'm very suspicious about thet guy. But my boat won't hold together no longer. An' I haven't got no net, either. Last season I hand-lined salmon. Hard job an' poor pay!"

"Is it enough to live on?"

"Well, yes, if you can make a little durin' winter to help out."

"What's a net cost?"

"Around two hundred dollars. I could make one for less, but it takes time, an' I'm lazy."

"Garry, I've a little money. And Dad will lend me the balance. He's just built a dandy new boat. Come in with me, Garry. We'll be partners. I furnish equipment to start. We'll share profits."

"Kev, what are you talkin' about?" asked the fisherman incredulously. "I've got a bad name. I'm only a lazy no-good, rum-guzzlin' riverman. It'd ruin you to be braced with me."

"Ruin? Ha! I'd like to know what I am now. Garry, I don't believe you're as bad as you make out. You know the Rogue. It's about all there's left for me. I always liked you. I'd swear by you. So come on. Let's be partners. Let's give Atwell a whirl."

"By Gord, Kev, I'll take you up!" shouted Garry.

CHAPTER TWO

Devil Unleashed

THE river called Keven. At night he lay awake listening to its low roar. He longed to drift into the wilderness, into the mountain fastness which the Rogue penetrated.

But obstacles arose. The sheriff arrested Garry Lord on a belated warrant. Fishing out of season was the

charge, and it required no effort to trace it to the factor now dominant in river affairs. Keven had to raise money to get him out, as well as for the necessary equipment of market fishermen. His father at length found the means. So it came about that Keven had to remain at home, during which time occurred inevitable meetings with old acquaintances.

Girls he had been friends with, now grown into modern young women, eyed him in curiosity as if they had never known him. However, it was the honest gladness and warmth of Minton, the tackle dealer, whom Keven had once fished with many a summer day, that hurt him. For here was faith and loyalty he had not expected. "To hell with all that rot!" Minton had exclaimed, when Keven had haltingly hinted of the calumny which had been heaped upon him. "Nobody believes it. Sure I don't. Drop in at the store. I'll show you some of the new tackle we've developed. Steelhead fishing has become a great booster for the old town. But there's only a few of us to fight the canning hogs at Gold Beach. If we don't unite and restrict them the grand fishing on the Rogue will soon be gone."

He met Clarke and Dugan, likewise former fishing comrades, and old Jim Turner, and the Negro Sam Johnson—all of whom were cordial in their welcome.

Then he turned a corner to be confronted by a tall, blond, sweet-faced girl who appeared strangely familiar. He swerved.

"Kev Bell! You can't dodge me," she called in a high treble. "Don't you know me?"

"I—I do and I don't," replied Keven confusedly.

"Guess," she said archly. "I was *one* of your schoolgirl sweethearts."

"Your face I know. But I—I can't place you. I sustained an injury to my head. It affected my memory."

"You fickle soldier! I am Emmeline Trapiet."

"Well, I know you now," he replied heartily, and wrung her hand. "Lord, I'm glad you spoke to me, Em."

"Have you seen Billy yet?"

"Billy who?" inquired Keven.

"Why, Billy Horn, your old chum."

"Oh! No, I haven't run into Billy yet," replied Keven.

"You will soon, for he'll hunt you up. Come, Kev, walk out home with me."

"I'd like to. But it wouldn't do for you to be seen talking to me."

"I'll risk it, Kev. We're not all snobs. Mother will be glad to see you. Did you know my brother Hal was killed in France?"

"Hal! No, I didn't. I've heard so little. My God, that's terrible, Emmeline; I'm sorry. I never got over there."

They walked down the street toward the residence quarter.

"You were badly hurt, though, I heard," she said solicitously.

"Yes. It'd been better if I'd gone west, too."

"You've seen Rosamond?" she asked gravely.

"Not to speak to. I called Sunday. She wasn't home. And again last night. The maid took my name. But Rosamond was not at home—to me. I saw her through the window."

"Don't take it to heart, Kev."

"Well, it hurt so little I was surprised. Em, I wish you'd tell her I felt honor-bound to release her—no, never mind. That's ridiculous."

"I don't see Rosamond often," rejoined the girl. "She belongs to the new set. While I—well, Kev—I'm engaged to Billy."

"Fine!" ejaculated Keven. "I congratulate you both. I wish you everything life can give, Em."

"Thanks, Kev," she said, stopping at a gate. "Won't you come in and speak to Mother? She'll weep over you. But don't mind. It'll do her good to see you back alive."

"Yes, I'll come. But wait just a moment, Em. I want to ask you something. Was it Atwell who started this vile gossip here? I mean that scandal about a family named Carstone, who lived near our training camp. Five sisters who—but did you hear it?"

"Yes, Kev, I did, and I—we never believed it," she returned warmly, her face scarlet. "It was Atwell who started that talk. Billy told me so. He heard him."

"Emmeline, I swear it's a lie," returned Keven appealingly.

"Kev, you needn't have denied that," she replied. "Come in now."

Later, on the main street, he espied Rosamond Brandeth. She was driving a flashy car. Bareheaded, bare-armed she sat at the wheel. Keven stopped stock-still. She saw him. She knew him. That he realized in the flash of her eyes. The sleek, handsome head went up. She drove on with no other sign and her gay laugh trilled back. Keven turned to see her companion was a man, young, and bareheaded, too.

"Well, that's over and I'm glad," muttered Keven, resuming his walk.

He went into Minton's store and straightway forgot the episode. Here Keven had spent many an hour in the years gone by selecting and rejecting the varieties of fishing gear.

"I'd bet you couldn't keep long out of here," laughed Minton.

"It's nice to see you once more among your treasures," replied Keven. "But, Joe, I—I guess I'll never cast a fly again."

"Ha! Ha! Listen to him! Once a fisherman always a fisherman, Kev. The old river will get you back. You were born on it. The Rogue will cure you, Kev. Give you back all you've lost!"

"Mint, you were always a great salesman," said Keven admiringly.

"Sure! But, you darned fool, I'm just glad to see you home. I don't want your money."

"I haven't any," replied Keven. "Just got Garry Lord out of jail. Dad's going to raise enough to buy us a net. I've decided to try the market-fishing game with Garry."

"Deuce you have! That's not a bad idea, Kev. Garry is the best salmon fisherman on the river. If you can keep him sober!"

"Mint, I may need some keeping myself," laughed Keven.

"Oh, say, Kev, you didn't learn to hit the booze?"

"Mint, I got in the habit of drinking because it relieved my pain," replied Keven sadly. "I don't know which is worse now."

"You take to fishing again, Kev Bell," said Minton with earnest bluntness. "It's your best bet. There's a living in it. And more—for you. Market-fish for a few years—save your money—and put it in an apple farm. Oregon apples! Fortune in them, Kev."

"Apple farm? Well, not so bad, Mint. I'd like it, and if I can save some money! You make me feel sort of hopeful."

"That's the fisherman of it, Kev. Always anticipating, always hopeful. Every bend of the river beckons—every pool

may bring better luck. Life should be like that."

"You make me wish I had the dough to buy a lot of tackle," replied Keven dejectedly.

"Say, you don't need any dough," retorted Minton. "Buy what you like and pay me when you can. I don't care if you never pay, far as I'm concerned. I owe you something."

Keven was powerless to resist this offer, and straightway plunged into the old delight of choosing a rod and suitable outfit to go with it.

"No more," he vowed, finally, waving back the generous and enthusiastic dealer.

"Well, when you bust that come in for more," declared Minton. "And now listen to your Uncle Dudley. Find a likely flat or bench down the river. And locate it. File a mining claim. Do your assessment work faithfully. Someday it'll be valuable property, even if you don't strike gold."

"Gold! What are you driving at?"

"Have you forgotten the Rogue has given up its millions to miners?" went on Minton earnestly. "There's gold down the river. Gold in sand bars, gold in quartz ledges. Fall in with one of those old prospectors and learn from him. Whitehall is one of them. He has a claim at Whiskey Creek. Make friends with the half-breeds. Most of them are good fellows. Get acquainted with the trail packers, too."

"Thanks for the tip, Minton," said Keven gratefully. "You make me feel like a regular fellow."

"Now one last word, Kev," went on the dealer, with lowered voice. "Every year fewer salmon and fewer steelhead come up the river. Find out why. This partner of yours, Garry Lord, is keen as a bloodhound. Get him on the job.

We fishermen up here fear Brandeth will ruin the river. He'll hog the fish and kill the runs. The netting at the mouth ought to be stopped. Or if not that, restricted. One man particularly and a few more getting rich at the expense of the people of Oregon. It's an outrage."

"Minton, I certainly agree with you, if that's the condition," rejoined Keven earnestly. "How does this Gus Atwell stack up to you?"

"Not very high, Kev," replied Minton. "He was a slacker. He rolls in money now. He's against the upriver market fishermen. And for that matter all kinds of fishermen."

"Somebody ought to put a crimp in Atwell."

"I'll tell the world," agreed Minton. "Kev, when he came home, 'invalided' from training service, he told some of the boys you had been mainly responsible for the ruin of five sisters."

"I suppose Atwell swaggered around in a uniform and dazzled the ladies."

"He did. And made us fellows sick."

The thing rankled in Keven. Even work with Garry over fishing nets and boat equipment did not suffice to soften it. They planned to pack camp duffle and provisions on Saturday, preparatory to their departure early Sunday.

If Keven had not had anything to drink on Saturday night he would have gotten away from town without giving the gossips more to wag their tongues over. Still he was sober that Saturday night when he encountered Atwell in the crowded lobby of the principal hotel. Liquor seldom made Keven drunk, but it found a hidden devil in his depths.

"Hello, Major, I've been looking for you," he said, confronting the well-groomed and well-fed Atwell.

"Sorry I can't return the compliment," replied Atwell. He turned his back.

Keven's outflung hand spun Atwell around.

"You lied about me, you—skunk!" exclaimed Keven in ringing voice. "I'm going to call you to your face. It was *you* who was mixed up in that Carstone outrage, not I. Why didn't you tell Grant's Pass that the soldiers burned you in effigy?"

Atwell's face grew livid. "You filthy soldier bum! Everyone knows that crack you got made you weak in the head. But take care—"

Keven struck him, causing him to stagger along the rail of the stairway to the wall. The blow brought blood. It was not violent, but it unleashed a devil in Keven.

"What I said goes," he shouted. "Invalided home! Yes, you white-livered cur. But the soldiers know. And as for the dirty lie you spread—if you accuse me again of the Carstone muck, I'll kill you!"

Fiercely Keven grasped a vase from a table and swung it on Atwell's head. It knocked Atwell flat to the floor, where he lay stunned.

CHAPTER THREE

Shooting the Rogue

REMEMBERING his father, Keven regretted his violence, and hurried home to tell of it, and that arrest would surely follow unless he got out of town. To his surprise the old man took the news with satisfaction. "Good! Glad you soaked Atwell. I'd done it myself," he said spiritedly.

"Dad, I'll beat it now. Will keep you posted about what's doing at Gold Beach. Good-by." Keven took his pack and tackle and went out. He crossed the meadows to the dark pines, and holding outside the edges of these he groped his way down to Garry's shack. The fisherman was not at home. A fire smoldered in the stone circle. Keven replenished it.

His next action was to remove his uniform and don in its stead the flannel shirt and overalls he had bought. He had also a heavy water-proof coat lined with wool.

A rattling of gravel startled him. Someone was stumbling down the low bank under the pine. "That you, Garry?"

"Wash masher?" Garry staggered into the firelight, red of face, panting for breath, drunk as a lord.

"Nothing the matter with me, Garry," replied Keven. "You're three sheets in the wind, though. How'd you escape the police?"

"All lookin' fer you, b'gosh."

"Me? What for?"

"Heerd you mashed Majjer Atwell on the coco."

"Well, for once, rumor is right. I sure did."

"We gotta beat it."

"Downriver at night?" queried Keven, alarmed.

"Sure Mike. Little ways. An' we'll camp on the other side."

Keven took his bag and tackle and carried them down to the river. He flashed his light. The skiff had been neatly packed. Keven deposited his belongings below the stern seat and went back up the bank. Garry came out of the shack with a roll of blankets and a canvas.

"Here, man, let's roll them up in the tarp," said Keven.

He spread the blazing sticks and kicked sand over them. Suddenly all was pitch dark. Feeling his way down, he finally made out Garry's shape and the pale outline of the boat. He was about to flash the electric light again when a police whistle deterred him.

"Garry, they're after me," he whispered.

"Sojer boy, they're after us," returned the fisherman, chuckling.

"What'd you do, Garry?"

"I shure beaned thet ossifer. He ast me where you was. An' when I swore didn't know he pinched me."

"Get in the skiff. Easy now. What's the dope?"

"Watch me, Kev, old boy," rejoined Garry, who had taken the seat facing the stern.

Keven stepped softly into the skiff and, sitting down upon the other seat, he carefully pushed off with an oar.

"Garry, you won't shoot this rapid below in the dark? We'd better line the boat down."

"Line nuthin'."

"But, man, you're drunk!"

"Wha's difference?"

Out from the gloom of the pines the skiff moved and the current caught it. The river gleamed under the stars. Garry faced downstream, his oars dipping noiselessly. Evidently, drunk or sober he knew his business on that river. Another shrill whistle rang out from the dark shore, followed by a hoarse call: "Hyar's the shack, Bill. Come on."

Keven poised his oars and watched the guarded movement of Garry's. Then a dull heavy roar of tumbling waters smote his ears. The skiff was now in the middle of the stream; the

current was quickening; the roar grew clearer. Garry turned to whisper: "All we gotta do is hit the middle where she dips."

Keven stood up, the better to see. Somewhere beyond them the livid gleaming river appeared to end. Bold black banks stood up on each side, and sharp treetops pierced the sky. Keven resumed his seat, only to rise again bending somewhat to hold the oars. Then, not so far ahead, he made out white tips of wild waves upflung. Next he saw a long silvery incline, V-shaped, rolling and bobbing, from which thunder rose. His skin tightened cold on his face as he felt the wind of the rapid.

"Garry, we're square in the middle."

What the hoarse answer was Keven could not distinguish, but it rang full of the daredevil assurance of the riverman. Keven sat down to grip the oar handles. Swifter current caught them; the banks blurred; the stern of the skiff rocked and dipped; then they shot down, to smash into the curling back-lash. They bounced high between spread sheets of water and went over straight as a die into the long buffeting incline. Then Keven saw only Garry's oars, the action of which he duplicated swiftly.

Garry began to pull hard, edging to the right. Below, the rapid split bellowing round a black rock. The skiff slowed, slanted diagonally across the channel, moving inshore while on the breast of the current, and missed the ugly obstacle by a yard. Garry racked his oars, to turn and grin at Keven in the pale gloom. Keven followed suit. They drifted on below the rapid into smooth deep water where the river glided darkly.

"Like swipin' candy from the baby," whispered Garry hoarsely. Then he

turned the skiff and rowed downstream. Keven rested on his oars. His face felt damp. His breast labored.

They turned a bend. Black rose a high wooded hill. The river broadened. Garry kept to the side opposite to that on which the road ran.

The roar of the next rapid began to disturb Keven. The riverman, however, rowed ashore and beached the boat on a sandy bar, under the shade of trees. After Keven stepped out he pulled it well up and made the bowline fast to a root.

"Kev, lez sleep some," said Garry, tugging at the bedroll. "Wake me early fer I'll be dead to the world."

They spread tarpaulin and blankets on a level grassy plot, and removing coats and shoes they went to bed. Garry was asleep as soon as he stretched out, but Keven felt wakeful. He was extremely tired. His body throbbed and burned. Such exertion, not to say excitement, was new and very exhausting to him. At last, with the dreamy hum of the falls in his ears, Keven fell asleep.

He awakened at the first streaks of dawn, and it took a moment for him to realize where he was. He had to shake Garry hard to awaken him.

"My God, I thought—thet jailer was—proddin' me," yawned Garry, sitting up. "Mornin', soldier boy."

"Cut that, Garry. Call me anything but that," replied Keven. "I'm your fishing mate now."

"Ex-coose me, Kev. Gosh, I gotta have a drink," said the riverman, throwing off the blankets. "I fetched a bottle. We don't want to risk buildin' fire an' cookin' breakfast along here."

"What's your plan, Garry?"

"We'll run down an' stop short of Hell Gate," replied Lord speculatively. "Them cops will drive along the river

lookin' fer us. They can't see the river except in certain places, where you bet we won't be. We'll camp an' eat, an' tomorrow mornin' early get by the bridge an' Galice. But sure as hops them cops will be waitin' at the end of the road. We'll fool 'em though, fer the Alameda bridge went out this winter. An' all they can do is watch us run through."

It was daylight when they rowed out from the shore. A cloud of mist overhung the river like a lowering pall. Under its cover the fugitives could safely pass on to where the river wound out of sight from the road.

When they reached the rapid, Garry turned to his partner, while poising his oars. "Take her through, Kev. Let's see if you've forgot."

"I'm on, Garry," said Keven, and stood up some distance above the incline, to get his bearings. A cool tickling ran along his spine. But he awakened to Garry's confidence. It was a slow rapid, necessitating a varied course to avoid rocks. Keven sat down to pull a little to the right, and when he dipped over the incline he had the skiff in hand, half diagonally across the channel, and once below the fall, a few strong tugs with the aid of the current worked her out of line with the first submerged rock. Then he turned straight, stern forward, to take the main volume of water, his eye keen on the next rock. Some rods above it he pulled slantingly to the left and let the current take him by. The rest of the rapid was trivial.

"You ain't forgot nuthin'," declared Garry, taking up his oars. "That was apple pie."

Keven stifled a yell which swelled in his throat. That he could feel so good again—alive—strong—active—bold!

On they rowed, down the still stretches, and drifted down the long ripples, and shot the rapids which repeated themselves every mile or so, while the mist lifted, and deep blue patches of sky showed through and the green wooded slopes. Soon the sun burst through to flood the valley with light. By afternoon the fugitives had reached the constriction of the valley, where the river cut through under cliffs of bronze. Hell Gate was close. Garry pointed to a shady bench.

"There we are, Kev," he said, grinning. "We'll make camp an' take it easy."

Ashore Keven helped at making camp, at the chores around the camp-fire. With dusk, Garry kindled the fire, and Keven had a long unthinking hour lounging before it. Soon sleep claimed him, and scarcely had he closed his eyes, it seemed, when Garry routed him out.

"Hey, are you dead?" called Garry. "We gotta dig."

The morning appeared scarcely to have broken, or the banner of mountain mist hung thicker. It was like gray twilight. Before they shoved off Garry said, "Kev, I'll take her through Hell Gate. You jest watch."

Garry rowed into the center of the narrowing river. Keven could not see the tips of the cliffs, which were obscured. He turned a corner, whence came a sullen roar. Garry wheeled the boat to face that threatening sound. The channel narrowed to a box, and dimly ahead Keven made out the gate. Passage looked impossible and shook his heart.

They entered the box, rode a swelling ridge of water, and shot like a plummet into the gray roaring hell of that sinister gateway. Garry pulled

with swift powerful short strokes. They were lifted toward the corner of the wall, where the water climbed in whirling fury. But they fell back with the wave and sped by through the gate. The angry waters spread hissing. Garry rested on his oars.

"Run it easy. Fall in, Kev. Let's get by the bridge an' Galice."

Soon the even powerful strokes propelled them to the bridge, dim in the gray fog, and under it, and beyond to where the river turned out of the gorge into a valley again. Galice appeared a sleeping village, without one column of smoke from its cottage chimneys. Below Galice another thunder of rapids greeted the boatmen.

"S rapids ahead," said Garry.

They navigated a series of ripples between shallow islands and bars, to run into a circling pool, which curved to the right and leaped with a bellow into gray darkness under a high black overhanging slope. They backed the skiff until an invisible hand seemed to snatch at it and fling it over a runway into a choppy crested channel, down which it bobbed like a cork, rising over the white mounds, to pound at last once more into open, spreading river.

Here they passed the Lewis Ranch and sped on over the rock ledges and gravel bars and ripples which had once been Keven's favorite fishing waters. The mist was breaking. A mile-long stretch of river followed on a sharp bend. Chair Riffle! Here ran the famous steelhead pool. Then on they went round the bend, over the rapids that had cost Keven many a game trout; on under a sunny blue sky.

The quiet stretches of river grew few and far between, but the current took its fall gradually. Alameda! The

end of the road and the entrance of the Rogue into the wilderness! Another turn fetched them within sight of the wide pool above Alameda Falls. Here a great gap yawned in the bridge that spanned the head of the fall. Keven's quick eye espied a motorcar, and men standing on the left bank.

"Told you so," shouted Garry, turning to Keven.

"What'll we do?" queried Keven.

"Nuthin'. They'll reckon they'll halt us above the fall. But we'll go right on over—an' then to hell with 'em!"

They rode the long swift stretch that ended in the huge eddy. The current here slowed for a hundred yards, then converged towards the gap in the bridge, where the river disappeared.

The policemen on the bank began to make authoritative gestures, which grew violent as the boatmen made no effort to row out of the current. Then the pull of the fall caught the boat and it was too late. The officers saw that. They yelled:

"Row ashore or we'll shoot!"

Garry stood up to reply in stentorian voice. "We gotta go over!"

Alameda Falls, without any officers of the law, or any broken bridge, was ticklish enough to run. The drift swung to the left and circled over black knife-edge rocks on the lip of the fall. Garry pulled well to the right of the middle and had to keep pulling to hold that position. When Garry shipped his oars Keven knew all was well for that descent. As the skiff careened on the curved green crest of the incline he let out a wild yell, which he scarcely heard in the din. Down they slipped—crash! And then fast indeed did they speed down the diminishing waves away from the falls.

Keven remembered the policemen.

He turned. They were bouncing up and down, waving weapons and yelling. A few seconds had carried the skiff two hundred feet and more beyond.

Garry put his thumb to his nose and spread his fingers. "Come an' get us—you lousy loafers!"

The policemen began to shoot.

"Wow! Low bridge, Kev. Duck your nut!" Garry shouted, and fell into the bottom of the boat.

Kev crouched low behind a gunwale, while the bullets whanged and splashed all about the boat, until it drifted out of range.

CHAPTER FOUR

Through the Wilderness

BELOW Alameda the river wound around a bend in the green mountain-sloped canyon. Keven realized he

had left civilization and law behind. For more than a hundred miles the Rogue bisected a wilderness that was a law unto itself. The great slopes slanted to towering crags where eagles soared. Then another heavy roar filled Keven's ears.

"Snap out of it, Kev," called Garry. "Thet's the Argo, an' she ain't no slouch to run. We gotta pull like hell to keep close on the right. There's a ledge we can slip over."

Another turn brought into view a rocky black gap, where huge ledges, striped with white quartz, obscured the river. It jumped into a pit, but a goodly part of the current kept to a long bench. Garry began to sing, "Pull for the shore, sailor, pull for the shore."

Keven lent himself with all his power to aid Garry in making the desired

place. Soon they were in the heavy current, from which there was no backing. A hundred feet below the main body of water thumped into a hole from which rose clouds of mist. They could not now see the slanting ledge that was to help them over. But they knew where it lay. They rowed with deep strong strokes. When within six feet of the butting black bluff, and twice as far from the dip, Garry shipped his oars.

Like a swan the skiff took the leap into the narrowing millrace that sped high above and alongside the cauldron below. With plummet speed they went over, and such was the celerity of the new boat that, despite Garry's sudden and tremendous exertions, she bumped hard into the cliff. Keven was thrown off his seat, and one of his oar handles hit Garry a sudden blow in the back. The backlash drew them away from the wall, and when Keven had righted himself and gotten his oars fixed, they were drifting safely into the pool below. Only then did Garry turn, grievous pain and amazement showing on his face.

"What t'hell you doin', soakin' me thet way?"

"Accident, Garry. When you tried to knock down the cliff I went flying off my seat."

"By gosh, Kev. Our boat's a hummer. She's too good. Too fast. We gotta load her, or Lord only knows where we'll jump when we hit Kelsey Canyon."

So they drifted and rowed, glided and eddied, and drove on into the deepening wilderness of the range. They ran Graves Creek Fall, and once more Keven's skin prickled. Garry beached the skiff at the head of Lower Graves.

"Gotta start linin' sometime," he said. "An' this bird is a good one to break in on."

They took the long line out of the bow and, shoving the skiff adrift waded down along the shore, holding back and letting loose as the exigency of the case demanded. But when the boat shot over they had to run, hanging on as best they could, while the line whizzed through their hands. Keven slipped on a rock that was like ice, and down he plunged at Garry's heels, striking on his shoulder and face. He saw a million stars.

They went on, but it was long before Keven regained the spirit of the voyage. Reamy Falls was a big drop, where the river roared into a foaming hole. It could not be run. They had to portage their cargo around the fall, over tremendous stones between which deep ruts yawned. And lastly the skiff had to be dragged, and hauled, and skidded over the bare ledges to the channel below. After that ordeal Keven was exhausted. But the river, as if to make up for that violent break, glided smoothly and evenly for a distance, then rippled on to Whisky Creek, which was the voyagers' objective for that day.

Huge pine trees stood upon the bench, and back of them a rudely fenced garden and a log cabin. Here dwelt Whitehall, a prospector.

The barking of his dogs brought him down to welcome his visitors, a stalwart man, still in the prime of life, rugged and weather-beaten.

"Hullo, Whitey," Garry greeted him. "Guess who's with me this run."

"Kev Bell, or I'm a lonely sinner!" replied the prospector. "Come up to the cabin. I haven't seen a white man since last fall."

"How's the gold pannin' out?" asked Garry.

"I'm on the track of a strike."

"Whitey, you've been on thet for ten years I know of."

"Yes. But I'll show you. I've struck it at last."

He led them into his one-room cabin. A ham of jerked venison hung on the wall. Sight of that made Keven's mouth water.

"Take it along. But Look ahere, Garry." Whitehall showed them gold—in dust, in nuggets, in quartz.

"Jumping' silversides!" ejaculated Garry, his eyes alight, as he scratched his dandy hair. "You didn't have this on my last run."

"No. I've struck it, Garry. An' I won't be here on your next," replied the prospector significantly.

"By gosh, I'm glad fer your sake. Whitey, you musta made thet strike over around Tyee Bar somewhere?"

"No, I wasted years on Tyee, just because the Chinks took millions off that bar in years gone by. Garry, the gold on the bars came down the river, in floods. I found mine in the hills, back of here. But tell me the news from upriver. What're you doin' down here, Kev?"

While the prospector got supper for them he talked incessantly, as one thirsty for communication with the outside world. When Keven's story came out, his only comment was: "Kev, you're wise to take to the river. But pass up the salmon. Hunt for gold!"



In the morning Whitehall accompanied them down to the river and bade them a cheery farewell, "Good-by boys, Good

luck." And as they shoved off into the current he called: "Send me word by the trail packers about the fish-hog business down there."

"We'll send you one of Brandeth's ears!" shouted Garry.

Then the current of the Rogue caught them, raced them round a timbered corner into the long chute that ended in Tyee Bar.

"Garry, oughtn't we go ashore and look the rapids over?"

"Sure, but I can run Tyee with one hand tied," was the gay reply.

It seemed to Keven that the famous Tyee leaped at their faces until he was blind and deaf. When they flashed out of the big waves, on to the long glistening, glassy runway, something of Garry's wild spirit had taken permanent hold of Keven. So they ran the Corkscrew, Devil's Ribs, Black Bar, and on down sunlit lanes past the meadows, and the gentle lingering, rippling Winkle Bar, on and on through still gorge to the boulder-jumbled constriction of the river at Blossom, where not even a saw log could have passed unscathed. They packed the outfit round this rapid and slid the boat over rocks and between rocks to the open channel below.

Then on into an endless murmuring solitude the voyagers drifted, rested, rowed and glided, silent under the cool gleaming walls and the fern-covered cliffs, until at last the solemn roar of Mule Creek Canyon assailed their ears and shocked the flint into their veins.

In the open sunlight, at the head of a wall of bronze rock which barred the valley, they rowed ashore on the left side, to beach the skiff on a gravel bar.

"We'll climb up an' take a look," said Garry.

They climbed up and out across the rock to the split, where far below the

river waved like a white ribbon in the wind. Garry walked half a mile farther, and halted above the Narrows.

"It ain't no joy ride," he remarked soberly, "but since we gotta run it, let's hurry back an' pile into her."

Whereupon they swiftly retraced their steps. Before Garry shoved off he said, "You never run Mule Creek?"

"No," replied Keven,

"Well, if we don't fill when she jumps off here we'll be okay till we come to the Narrows. There it's jest luck. If that whirlpool's open you gotta pull your very guts out until it closes."

Beyond the bronze corner of wall the boat poised on a green curve, then plunged, suddenly to be lifted by colossal power, to smash over the back-lashing wave, into a seething maelstrom, out of which she was propelled as if by a catapult. Then she rode a swelling ridge of green, between sinister overhanging walls, against which the water curled and boiled with millions of bubbles. Garry held his oars poised. They drifted like a feather.

Soon the thunder of the rapid at the entrance lulled and ceased. The river sped on, almost quiet. Then the crest of current in the centre spread, and great eddies caught the boat, turning her round.

"Let her turn!" boomed Garry, as the amazed Keven dipped an oar. And so they whirled, sometimes several times in one giant eddy, before they were released and sent on.

Round a jut of wall they swept. Keven saw a jagged ledge crossing diagonally to within ten feet of the opposite cliff. This was the Narrows.

Garry began to row in desperation. Keven caught his stroke and bent with every ounce of weight and strength. They checked the speed, they held her

back, so that inch by inch she drifted toward the hellish hole now visible. It was the whirlpool, open and engulfing. The current did not look so terribly swift. But it was the swell of the river, passing that obtruding corner, that caused the whirlpool.

Keven's terror broke when he saw the hole closing and filling. But the resistless current carried the boat past the corner, through the narrow gateway, right upon that whirlpool. It gave a horrible gurgle. Keven's right oar was wrenched out of his hand. It stood upright. It whirled as if upon a rapid lathe. It sank straight down before his eyes; and the boat, caught in the toils, whirled and whirled. Suddenly then the river bulged where the suckhole had been.

Garry pulled the bow from threatened collision with the wall, and on the skiff drifted, slower and slower, round more corners, at last out again into the sunlight of the open valley.

"Jest an incident in a riverman's life," remarked Garry facetiously. "That's all that's bad today. We'll camp below Solitude."

Keven fished out one of the extra oars from under the packs and put it in place. But not soon did he row.

On they traveled through a narrow gorge above white water, and down a long swift beautiful racecourse of shimmering water, and on still into wide peaceful reaches, to turn the curve which led into the river lane ending in magnificent Solitude.

Keven knew the long lovely lane. This was the wildest stretch, the sweetest and shadiest, that ran down to the bend of Solitude—a mining camp of early days—and to the finest pools and ripples, for steelhead, of all the Rogue.

"There's Aard," said Garry. "Let's stop an' have a word with him."

Keven espied a man at a sand-bar edge. Garry rowed ashore, to step out and shake hands with a tall lithe man, dark as an Indian.

"Hello, Aard. Glad to see you. I'm late on the run this season. Shake hands with my new pard."

"Keven Bell. Reckon I know him," replied the other, extending a hand that slapped Keven heartily on the shoulder. "He stayed with us once. How are you, boy?"

"How do, Aard?" replied Keven, trying to remember. "Wasn't it you who first put me on to Solitude steelhead? Years ago, it was."

"Not so long, at thet, Keven," replied Aard with a smile. "But I wasn't your first guide here at Solitude."

"No? But, Aard, I do remember you—and the river—and the steelhead."

"Thet's fine, boy. But come up to the cabin, an' mebbe you'll remember more."

Keven looked at his comrade. Garry spoke for both: "Thanks, Aard. But not tonight. We want to make camp at the spring below Solitude. Mebbe in the mornin'."

"Aard, how has the steelhead fishing been these last years?" queried Keven eagerly.

"Poorer all the time. Never a big steelhead gets up here till after October first."

"Hell you say!" ejaculated Garry.

"That's funny," added Keven, puzzled. "Till after October first!"

"Nuthin' funny about it," replied Aard. "You'll see if you're goin' through to Gold Beach. Are you?"

"Yes. I'm Garry's fishing partner now. See the net?"

"Well, I don't want to discourage you, but thet nettin' down at the mouth

is bad medicine for upriver fishermen."

"What'll they do to us, Aard?" asked Garry.

"Reckon they'll kill you," replied Aard grimly. "I was down to Gold Beach with my winter's catch of fur. An' I heerd some things."

"Ahuh. Well, don't discourage my young pard here," replied Garry, as he resumed his seat in the boat. "Shove her off, Kev."

"Sorry you won't come up," said Aard, his fine eyes on Keven. "Someone will be disappointed."

Keven laughed that off, as he bent to the oars. Probably he meant his folk, whom Keven did not recall.

Garry remarked, "Thet Jim Aard is a queer duck. I mean mysterious. Always has money. His cabins are the best on the river. He sends his family out often. An' he never packs enough fur to Gold Beach to make thet much money."

When they shot the last incline, over the rocky shelves that gleamed under the water, and turned the blue bend where the old mill stood moldering under its moss, and the great fir trees, Garry said they had time yet to make Missouri Bar. So they ran on, through the beautiful canyon, down to Missouri, where at sunset they hauled ashore and made camp.

Next morning at dawn they went whistling on their way, by the hamlets Illahe and Agness, to get through Two Mile Rapids and Clay Hill, both of which they ran. From there on the mountains melted back, the valley widened, the river slowed and spread. It ran now over wide shingles, between sandy bars and around gravelly islands. Shacks and huts heralded the return of the habitations of men. The wilderness had been passed. The river flowed

wearily, on into a wide bay, from whence it cut its way through low dunes of sand to the sea. On the fresh salt breeze floated the boom-boom of the surf.

CHAPTER FIVE

The First Run

HIGH on the pine-fringed south shore of the bay stood the town, picturesque and inviting, its white houses shining in the sunlight. Low on the north shore, in a deep bight, the long flat piers and canning factories showed gray against the green.

"Looks peaceful as it's pretty now," said Garry. "But wait till the salmon begin to run! I don't see many fishin' boats."

"Where's the netting done?" asked Keven.

"Out in the bay, everywhere an' anywhere, except across the mouth of the river. Law against thet. But it's done on the sly."

Garry made a deal with an Indian he knew to camp on his land and have a mooring. "If we strike fish I can hire a big flatboat from Stemm," said Garry. "Let's unload an' put up our tent under thet tree. Better fer us not to board uptown. Kev, are you strong on poker?"

"Nope. I'm too unlucky to gamble."

"Humph. What'd you learn in the Army, anyhow?"

"To drink and cuss, for two things."

"Well, they ain't so bad, to start market fishin' on. Fightin' comes jest natural then."

"Say, Garry, don't they have any law and order here?"

"Sure. Finest little town on the coast. But in the salmon season there's crowds of fishermen an' oodles of money. They're a hard crowd, these fishermen. From May till October first Gold Beach is sure prosperous."

"October first? Then that ends the netting season, and the fishermen leave?"

"You said it, bucko."

"Aard told us no big steelhead ever got up the river until after October first. Remember that, Garry?"

"Sure do."

"There's a connection between the close of the netting season here and the run of large fish up the Rogue."

"You bet."

"It's up to us to find out what that connection is."

"I've got my ideas about it."

Toward sundown Garry went off toward the town, while Keven strolled along the river, around the south shore of the bay, and out upon the strip of sand. At length he reached the spit of sand, the farthest point he could attain between the sea and river. Gulls and cormorants were screaming along the edge of the sand, where the tide was coming in. It had a resistless flow. Here Keven sat down.

The sun sank, the afterglow spread its pale gold over the sky, to flush and fade and die, and the pale gleaming light, herald of dusk, stole down across the bay to the narrow outlet. Suddenly Keven's meditations were disrupted by a heavy souse in the water. He knew that sound. "Salmon!" he cried, in delight, even before he saw the circling break, and a dark tail lazily slip out of sight.

Keven imagined the fact of salmon showing on the surface at the mouth of the river would be interesting news

for Garry Lord. Certainly where one salmon broke water there must be a hundred underneath. It might mean the opening of the season.

He wended his way back along the resounding beach. In camp he found Garry squatting before a fire.

"Where in hell have you been?" queried that worthy.

"Down by the shore."

"You gotta stay in camp," growled Garry. "Somebody might bump you off in the dark. An' steal everythin' we own."

"Any news from town?"

"Lord, yes. Heaps. Good an' bad. New cannery opened, in opposition to Brandeth's. It'll be about the only one at thet, an' on a small scale, I reckon. Town's full of fishermen from everywhere on this dinged coast. All waitin' for the leather-backs to run."

"Well, they're running," said Keven nonchalantly.

"Wh-at?"

"The first run is on."

Garry shook his tousled head dubiously and eyed Keven askance.

"Garry, I've got as good an eye for salmon as you or anyone else." Whereupon Keven calmly stated the facts about the salmon he had seen on the incoming tide.

"Jerusalem!" shouted Garry, and scrambling up he ran down to the river. Presently he came thumping back, puffing hard. "By gosh, Kev, the river's up half a foot. Sure as guns a bunch of salmon out there have got a snootful of mountain water, an' they're on the move!"

He dragged Keven down to the boat. "Grab a big long stone while I roll up the net. We gotta have anchor, rope, buoy. But no lantern. A light would give us away to some of them river-

men. Gosh, this's great. Me an' my pard stole a march on them last season. Surer'n hell we're agonna do it this year."

In short order they were in the skiff and rowing out down the river towards the shacks. Soon they were in the bay, feeling the slow press of the tide. A cool, damp, salty breeze came over the sand dunes.

"I heard a fish break," Keven whispered.

"Got a ear like your eye, huh?"

Souse! A heavy fish rolled on the surface close to the boat.

"Kazoozie! Did ye hear thet loafer? Too big and fat to cut the water. He'd go about fifty pounds."

"Garry, will we get paid by weight or just so much for every salmon?"

"So much a pound, first off, if we make a haul. An', Kev, by gosh, I feel it in my bones. We're gonna do it. Listen to thet hunker!"

Garry rowed noiselessly upon a stretch of water close to where the bay converged again into the river, preparatory to its confluence with the sea. Here in days past, on the early runs, he and his partners had made great hauls. There was a shelving bottom, over which the current flowed quickly, and here the salmon, keen to taste the fresh cold water from the river, swam in bunches.

"Kev, the idee is to locate your fish, then anchor one end of your net, tie on a buoy, stretch her across the run, an' hang at thet end with the boat," expounded Garry, as he paddled to and fro in the shadow, evidently jockeying for position.

"Garry, they're all around us now. Heads upstream, lazy, just rolling along. But they're moving. I'd say it was a run."

"Say! My Gord, man! You can whoop it to the skies!"

"Not a boat on the bay!" exclaimed Keven, gleeful as a boy.

"What's worryin' me is we can't load any big haul in this skiff," went on Garry.

"Well, when we get the net out there'll be lots of room for fish."

"By gosh, if there's a good run I'll swim ashore, mozy back to Stemm's an' fetch out the big flatboat."

Eventually Garry found a location to his liking. It was perhaps a quarter mile from the mouth, just where the river broadened into the bay, and close to the north shore. The current ran fairly swiftly.

"You take the oars now, Kev." He carefully slid the big stone overboard. When it touched bottom he tied a buoy on the rope, where it joined the net, and let that over. "Now row toward shore, Kev."

Presently Keven found himself idle in the skiff, watching Garry, who kept a hand on the taut net rope. The surf fell with resonant hollow boom; close at hand the current drifted by with silky swish. Faint splashes and here and there a *souse* told of rising fish.

"B'gosh, I felt one hit," said Garry with a chuckle. "Kev, old top, we'll have salmon steak for breakfast an' tenderloin steak for supper. Wow! Another! Another! Gosh, this is gettin' good!"

Far out toward the buoy a salmon leaped the net with cutting splash. The breaks on the surface occurred oftener, here, there, all around. *Souse!* A big fellow hit the net high up, but did not get over. He stuck fast and threshed with whizzing sound.

"Strikes me they're running pretty thick," said Keven eagerly.

"Nope, not yet, an' mebbe they won't a-tall. But, a few salmon's like strikin' gold."

The moments passed, fraught with ever keener stir and thrill for Keven. There were lulls in the breaks on the surface and again continuous though scattered splashings. Salmon leaped the net in considerable numbers.

"Pull up anchor, Kev," said Garry finally. "I jest can't wait no longer."

Keven did as directed, and the skiff slowly drifted with the current up the bay. Garry began to haul in the net. The first ten feet fetched in two salmon, big fellows over forty pounds. They had to be big to catch by the gills in an eight-inch mesh. Garry swore softly to himself as he, with difficulty, extricated the fish. Then he slid them into the skiff. The next ten feet of net came in heavy with a number of kicking salmon. As Garry tugged and tore he talked to himself. He was happy. He was rich. The bottom of the skiff was soon covered with flapping, tail-flipping salmon. And still they came, all huge, black-humped fellows, plump-sided, with silvery bellies that shone in the starlight.

"It's a swell run, Kev," said Garry. "Lord, if they come thick an' fast later, as I reckon, we'll be swamped."

"We're going to be swamped right now," declared Keven.

It required an hour for Garry to clear the net, and then the skiff was so full that its gunwales were only a few inches above water.

"Row carefully now," instructed Garry. "Back where we were, inshore from the buoy." As Keven rowed, Garry again let out the net, until he came to the end. "Drop anchor, Kev. Hurry."

The skiff swung heavily, almost careened, then dragged to a stop.

"Okay. Couldn't be better. Here, take the rope," said Garry. "Jest you set there an' feel yourself gettin' rich. I'll go after the big flatboat. Don't you get nervous now, pard."

"Careful, you'll swamp us," rejoined Keven, as Garry slipped over the side into the water.

He let go of the skiff and struck out for the shore, his head and shoulders darkly parting the pale gleaming shadow. Finally he disappeared, but Keven could hear him swimming. He felt relieved when he heard the fisherman wading out. Then Keven attended to the vibrating rope in his hands and the many other sensations that assailed him.

Tug! Tug! Salmon began to pound against the cork line, to swish in the air, to split the water like plummets. If there were so many on the surface, how many more would be deep down? Wet salmon piled against his legs. He could find no room to sit comfortably, and he began to get cold.

Tug! Tug! Soon the net sagged so heavily that he could no longer feel when another salmon hit. He had to loop the rope around the oarlock. Then followed a spell of quiet.

Suddenly there came a surge on the net that rocked the overloaded skiff. Keven thought it was a stronger thrust of the tide. But, as there followed a quick flurry of water along the rope, then sharp splashes, culminating in a roar, he realized that he had been struck by a wall of fish. He could have yelled in his excitement. Then the skiff anchor began to drag. The burdened net was swinging upstream.

Keven, alarmed, cautiously drew the anchor off the bottom. After that the boat, dragging the net, drifted upstream, until in line with the buoy.

Keven let down his anchor. Also he released the net rope, and let it slowly out, until the drag was perceptibly lessened. But soon again the tremendous weight reasserted itself, until Keven was hard put to it to keep the skiff afloat. He was now in a pretty predicament, and he racked his brain to meet the situation.

Keven located his position by a tuft of brush on top of one of the sand dunes, and when he gradually edged out of line with this he knew the net anchor was dragging. At last, when he was about to abandon the net to row ashore and save at least, the skiffload of salmon, he heard something that was not splashing fish. He listened, his ear turned upstream. It seemed a long time before he made out a dark object on the water. Garry was a long time heaving up. The flatboat was wide and heavy. But at last Garry reached him.

"God—what—a pull!" he panted.

"Got an anchor?" queried Keven.

"Sure Mike."

"Drop it quick. Don't grab hold of me. I'm drifting with the net. It's chock-full of salmon. That rock is dragging. You didn't get back any too soon."

Garry wasted no time. He thumped over a heavy anchor, after which he reached an oar to Keven and pulled the skiff alongside the big flatboat. Indeed it looked like a barge.

"Gimme hold of—thet net rope," demanded Garry hoarsely. "Kev, slide your fish over into this boat. Careful now. If you rock her it's good night."

"I've been aware of that for a couple of long hours, Garry Lord," replied Keven, as he began to transfer the heavy salmon.

When at length he had lightened the skiff Garry stepped over out of the flatboat and began the laborious job of

hauling the net, while Keven stood by the oars. The net sagged with salmon. Garry raved while he worked. He was jubilant.

Before he had hauled twenty feet of the net the skiff was once more dangerously laden. "My Gord! Packed solid! Row back to the flatback, Kev. Slow now, fer I'm hangin' onto the rope, you bet."

They emptied that load, and this time Garry risked fastening the net rope to the flat boat. That facilitated the work. The heavy anchor held.

Garry filled the skiff four times. "Now, Kev, we gotta get back to thet place. How far have we dragged, do you reckon?"

Keven took his bearings from the sand dunes. "Hundred yards or so."

Garry pulled up the rock anchor, and then left Keven to manage the skiff while he returned to the flatboat. He had another tremendous pull to follow Keven back to their original spot close under the shadow of the sand dunes. Here he anchored the larger boat.

It was long past midnight and cold. The sea wind pierced Keven through. Numb and wet, he stuck to his oars, while Garry handled the net. Salmon continued to come in, and in four sets they filled the flatboat to the top of the gunwales. In the cold dim grayness of dawn, at slack tide, they rowed across the bay and up the river to beach the boats on the sand.

"Go to bed, pard. You sure done noble," advised Garry. "I'm a dead one myself, but I'll set on this haul of salmon till it's sold."

Keven could scarcely drag himself up to the tent. He was wringing wet, slimy as an eel, so frozen and exhausted that he could hardly get out of his clothes and into bed.

CHAPTER SIX

Lenient Lawman

WHEN Keven awakened the day appeared far spent. He rolled his aching body out of the blankets and found he

was stiff and bent, like an old man. It was labor to dress.

He went outside. Garry was nowhere to be seen. The big flatboat, with its heaped-up shining freight of salmon, was likewise missing. Keven set about getting a meal.

He had slept three-quarters of the day, as he could tell by the sun, already gilding the wooded hills in the west. When he had the meal almost prepared Garry appeared, treading as if on air. He wore a smile as wide as his ruddy face, and his blue eyes honestly beamed upon Keven.

"Two an' a half tons!" he announced grandiloquently. "An' I sold to Brandedth's manger—by weight! He had to buy. He couldn't let the first haul of the season go. Look at this roll of dough. Thet's yours. Fifty-fifty. You could choke a cow with thet."

With much extravagant speech he forced upon Keven a sizable roll of greenbacks. Then he produced a smaller one. "Pard, I'm askin' you to keep this much of my share. Hold it out on me. If I fall for celebratin'—an' thet's a cinch—hide it from me."

"You bet I will," replied Keven warmly, as he pocketed the money. "Garry, I'll pay Dad as soon as I can get to the post office."

"Right an' proper. I forgot. I'm in on thet," rejoined Garry, sitting down. "News of our ketch spread like wild fire. Stemm saw thet mess of salmon first

off this mornin', and he scooted off like the Indian he is. Before I'd cooked breakfast fishermen began to flock down here. Then Jarvis, the new cannery man, came down an' made me a swell offer. I said I'd see. 'Cause I was layin' fer Brandeth's man. Sure he come, an' when I chirped double what he paid last year he snapped me up without battin' an eye. I rowed the boat over to the cannery an' cashed in."

"Will that price hold for the season?"

"Yep, prob'bly will. Mebbe not. Last night was jest a flash in the pan, Kev."

"I had that notion myself."

"Sure it's early fer the real thing. But mebbe not. Stemm predicts an early season an' a big one. We started somethin'."

"Sit down and eat, Garry," said Keven gaily.

Later when Keven asked his partner if they would make any sets that night, Garry scratched his stubbled chin.

"Reckon we'll lay off. The river's back again. I ain't seen a fish break water all day, an' you bet I've kept my eye peeled. Thet run was jest a school of lunkers. They've gone up."

"It's just as well we lay off tonight," replied Keven. "I'll be laid out if we have two such nights in succession. I haven't been long out of the hospital, Garry. I'm not very strong."

"Thet was worryin' me, Kev. But you sure did noble last night. We'll let them yannigans lambast the river tonight all fer nuthin'."

After supper Garry went to town and Keven made his way by slow stages to the sand dunes, where he spent the hour of twilight and dusk beside the sea.

Garry did not return to camp that night, which omission in no wise sur-

prised Keven. In the morning he got up late, rested and refreshed, and after cooking breakfast started for town. Down by the river he encountered Stemm, to learn from him that no salmon had been netted by the fishermen.

Gold Beach appeared to be quite a place, clean, wide-streeted, with a fine stretch of business houses, and colorful residences in the background. Keven leisurely sauntered down the main thoroughfare, and upon locating the post office he went in and dispatched two money orders to his father. He added a note to acquaint his father with his safe arrival at Gold Beach and the wonderful good luck of his first market-fishing venture. Then he went out to look for Garry.

It looked a vain task even before he started, and it certainly proved to be one. There were in fact not many places where Garry Lord might have been found. At last far down the main street he came to a sign *Sock-eye*. He went in the *Sock-eye*.

A cigar and newsstand occupied the front. From this a door led to a smoky, noisy poolroom, full of boys and men. Keven did not need to be told that he had happened upon a rendezvous of the market fishermen, such as Garry had described to him. Tired from the walk, which had been a long one, Keven sat down to rest and watch.

Snatches of conversation he overheard betrayed a twofold occupation of these loungers' minds—fishing and gambling. Keven lingered there until he felt rested. On his way out a sharp-eyed man behind the cigar stand accosted him.

"What you want, stranger?"

"I stepped in to look for my partner," replied Keven easily.

"An' who's he?"

"Garry Lord."

"Lord, huh? Are you another upriver fishermen?"

"Yes. And I gather from the way you speak that the upriver fishermen are not so welcome in Gold Beach."

"You gathered correct, young man. But that doesn't apply here at the Sock-eye. All fishermen are welcome."

"Glad to hear that. Are you the proprietor?"

"Hardly," replied the man, with a wry smile.

"Who is?"

"Don't you know?"

"I certainly don't. Never was in Gold Beach before."

"Well, it won't be long till you find out who runs the big interests here—the Sock-eye included."

"Ahuh. Do you have any idea where I might find Lord?"

"Jail, mebbe. He was drunk last night. I heard he slugged some fisherman."

"Quite likely. Where's the jail?"

Upon being directed, Keven walked toward the jail. He encountered a middle-aged man, who stood in the doorway of the building designated, and who wore a star on his vest.

"I'm looking for Garry Lord," said Keven, without any beating about the bush.

"What'd you come here for?" queried the man.

"I was told I'd find Garry in jail."

"Who said so?"

"A man at the Sock-eye."

"An' who're you, young feller?"

"My name's Keven Bell. I'm Garry's partner, and I want to get him out of jail."

"What's you tell me your name for?"

"Because that's my real name," replied Keven, puzzled.

"No reason for you to hide it?"

"Not on your life!" retorted Keven.

"Come inside," said the other.

Keven followed him across the threshold into a small, barely furnished office. From a desk he picked up a sheet of yellow paper and handed it to Keven, manifestly for his perusal. It was a telegraph blank. Keven's heart sank. He read rapidly. The message came from Grant's Pass, ordered the arrest of one Keven Bell, for assault and resisting officers, and was from the chief of police.

"So that's—that," replied Keven, returning the telegram. "I—I should have expected it."

"Bell, I read in a Seattle paper about you—if you're the soldier who spent two years in a training-camp hospital."

"Yes, I'm the fellow."

"Had a queer accident, didn't you? Gun busted in practice. Back-fired on you."

"I should smile it did. Look here," replied Keven, and he pulled down his lower lip to expose the iron jaw.

"Hell! Knocked your teeth an' jaw out? I—I had a boy who got to France. He—he never came back."

"That's damn tough for you. I'm sorry," Keven hastened to say. "I wish to God I could have gone in place of your son."

"Why? That's no sane attitude."

Briefly then Keven recounted the misfortune and shame he had fallen upon when he returned home.

"By God! I heard about that Carstone family. An' you was innocent, Bell?"

"Yes, I was—of complicity in that."

"An' you slugged this Atwell for ruinin' your character at home?"

"Guess that was an excuse—to be perfectly honest, Sheriff," returned Keven

ruefully. "But I was jealous. I left a sweetheart behind. When I came back Atwell was rushing her hard. It galled me."

With slow and deliberate action the sheriff tore up the telegram. "I don't know any Keven Bell. An' I do happen to know Mister Atwell. *He's* no stranger hereabouts."

"Then—then you're not going to pinch me?" asked Keven.

"Not on the strength of that. But you keep it under your hat."

"Oh—thanks—Sheriff. I—you—"

"I met Garry last night," went on the sheriff, ignoring Keven's agitation. "Early in the evenin'. Garry an' me are not bad friends. He told me he had a new pard. 'Prince of a feller,' Garry said. Later I had to go on Garry's trail. He'd got drunk an' beat up one of Brandeth's pet fishermen. An Austrian. I dragged Garry out. But instead of pinchin' him I led him out of town an' told him to go sleep it off."

"He didn't come back to camp," returned Keven anxiously.

"Wal, he might have got slugged by one of these roustabouts. Bad blood here, Bell, as you'll find out. But Garry is cute, drunk or sober. He's safe in the woods, somewhere. Don't worry about him."

"What's your name, Sheriff?" asked Keven.

"Blackwood. I'm from up the river myself. Ashland. Drop in to see me. Not on Saturday, though. That's my busy day."

Keven went out. In front of the busy-appearing hotel, where cars were parked, and people passed in and out, a slim, fox-faced man accosted Keven.

"Are you the young man who helped Garry Lord make that salmon haul?" he queried.

"Yes, sir. I'm he."

"What might your name be?"

"It might be Jeff Davis or Jesse James—only it isn't," returned Keven tartly. He had recalled Blackwood's remark about his name.

"No call to be funny. Any relation of Lord's?"

"Just a fishing partner."

"Do you know he isn't liked here?"

"Yes. I've heard that no upriver fishermen are."

"That's a fact. They buck the game. There's an inside ring which you want to join. You agree to sell your fish to one buyer."

"But Garry and I prefer to be free to sell to anyone," replied Keven sturdily. "Whoever offers the most will get our fish. I understand there are two canneries now, besides the large one which Brandeth operates. That'll surely make better prices for all fishermen."

"It looks that way to a newcomer. And probably will fetch more money at the start. But you'll find yourself out of it altogether, when the big run's on."

"Bunk. That doesn't sound American to me," declared Keven.

"Lord and his former mate bucked us last season," rejoined the man. "We don't intend to let him get away with it this year. He won't have any sale for his fish. And that's why I'm giving you a hint."

"Thanks," replied Keven dryly. "But I think it's a bluff."

"You'll soon find out it's no bluff. You'll be out in the cold."

"I'll bet two bits you want me to join a clique to freeze out upriver fishermen. And probably this new rival cannery."

"Take it or leave it," snapped the other crisply.

"Whom do you represent?" inquired Keven.

"That's none of your business. If you signify your willingness to quit Garry Lord and join the ring, then—"

"Say," interrupted Keven. "You look like a crook and you talk like a crook. Go to hell!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

Marked Men

BY JUNE the season was at full blast at Gold beach. Likewise life at the Sock-eye. Keven Bell dropped in there often, first in a futile attempt to hang onto Garry, and then through a habit that formed. Money was Garry's downfall. He would slave for days and nights when a run of fish was on, only to squander his earnings on the bottle and the cards.

The Sock-eye roared that Saturday night. On flood tide the night before, and at flood the morning after, a magnificent run of salmon had swamped the fishermen. Wherefore they had plenty of money and most of it, if not all, was flooding back to the source whence it had come.

Keven bought cigarettes at the cigar stand, where Brander, the manager, said close to his ear, "Get Garry out of here if you can. He's drunk an' Mulligan is lookin' for him."

Mulligan was a hulking figure on the river, and he and Garry had clashed. There was a strong movement afoot to oust Garry. But for the rival canneries he could not have sold his fish for a pittance.

Keven went down the hall and back, without seeing Garry. Then he made

his way upstairs to the gambling-rooms. Comparative quiet reigned up there, the noise from below filtering through the walls. Half a dozen games of poker were on. And at one table sat Garry, hunched over his cards. Keven approached.

For once his partner appeared to be ahead of the game. Five other players participated here, and one of these was Mulligan, a bullet-headed Irishman, with a shock of red hair and a face like a bull. He was a loser, and the way he glowered at Garry boded no good for that worthy. Moreover several of Mulligan's cronies also sat in the game.

"Excuse me for butting in," spoke up Keven, to the players generally. "Come out of this, Garry."

"Wot's eatin' you, Kev?" queried Lord in surprise.

"I've got a good reason. Come on."

"But can't you see I'm 'way ahead of the game?"

"Well, it's the first time, that's a cinch. Beat it now. There's a Grant's Pass cop hunting for you."

"Hell with him, Kev."

"Brander gave me a hunch, too. He wants to tip you off."

"Go away, Kev, an' lemme alone. I'm gonna bust this bunch."

"All right then, you sap. Make me give it away," retorted Keven with pretense of anger. "There's a big run of salmon on."

That never had failed to fetch Garry. And it worked now. He pocketed his winnings and, backing his chair, stood up.

Mulligan glared at him. "Go wan, you little bandy-legged mud hen," he said in loud derision. "Quit when you're ahead."

"Sure. That's the time to quit. I

trimmed you good, for all your slick tricks," leered Garry.

Mulligan stood up to lunge at Garry, missing him only because the table intervened. Quick as a flash Garry swung a chair. Mulligan dodged, but he was too slow to avoid the flying chair, if he did save his head. It struck him square on the back and bounced off to crash through a window. Before the other gamblers could rise to battle Keven dragged the cursing Garry away and down the stairs.

Outside they ran plump into Blackwood, the sheriff. "Hey, boys, what's the occasion for such precipitation?" he asked.

"Mulligan and his cronies wanted to fight," replied Keven. "You know how obliging Garry is."

"I'm gonna lick that Mulligan," declared Garry, drawing back.

They led him up the street.

"Reckon I'd better run him in, Bell. Just for safety," said Blackwood. "And you better get back to camp."

"Aw, doggone it, I don't live at thet jail," objected Garry. "An', listen, Blacky, there's a run of fish. Thet's what got me comin'."

"Garry, I lied to you," admitted Keven. "I wanted to get you away."

"You double-crossin' old water dog," wailed Garry.

At the corner of the street Blackwood led them around to the entrance to the jail. "Go in, Garry. You know we're your best friends."

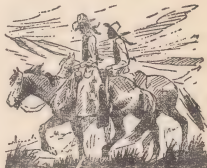
"Hell! Yes, you are. Take my winnin's, Kev, an' hide 'em," said Gerry, then passed into the building.

Blackwood tarried to speak with Keven. "I'll let him out in the mornin', Bell. I'd consider leavin' Gold Beach, if I were you. I happen to know— Lord's a marked man. There's a hell of a lot

more to this than jealous fishermen. Get him away. An' if you can't, go yourself."

"Thanks, Blackwood," returned Keven, and went his way.

Down by the Rogue at his camp he crouched before a little red-embered fire, gazed into its depths and listened to the lap of the waves and the distant thunder from over the sand dunes.



Garry returned to camp next morning, cheery and repentant, unable to recall or frankly disavowing any dereliction on his part. Keven took occasion to repeat and emphasize Blackwood's advice.

"What? Dig out an' leave the fishin' to these muckers? It ain't in me, pard."

"Well, then, let's not loaf around so much," suggested Keven. "If we keep busy fishing we're out of mischief. Let's go to trolling by day and stick at netting by night, runs or no runs. We'll be that much ahead."

"Keven, you're a bright guy," declared Garry admiringly. "By gosh, I'm with you. I'll stay away from town an' lay off thet Mulligan gang."

So they had a day of trolling with large spoons, taking turn about at rowing the skiff. Salmon rose few and far between; nevertheless they caught ten.

They satisfied themselves no run would be on soon. Salmon, in lagging numbers, were moving into the bay all the time.

Toward the close of the third day of trolling Garry's keen and experienced eye noted a fine sediment in the river. He peered into the water, felt it, tasted it.

"By gosh, if there ain't a rise comin' I'll eat my hat," he said. "Let's beat it to camp, get a snack of grub an' a little sleep—then come back with the net."

Garry did not have to eat his hat. That night late, having the bay to themselves, except for some trolling Indians, they netted two hundred and sixty-three salmon. On the three following nights, early and at the first of the flood tide, they made hauls far in excess of the other fishermen.

Keven had the extreme satisfaction of paying all his debts, and of adding a bonus for his father, and then had a tidy sum left. As for Garry, what might have been expected presently happened. He fell. The lure of the card table gripped him again; and when he lost he began to drink. Finally Keven felt forced to make a stand.

"Garry, old fellow, I'm sorry," he said, "but if you don't cut out the booze, I'm through."

The effect was instant and tragic. From amazement Garry passed to misery. "Kev, you jest couldn't throw me down."

"Couldn't I? You lay off or I'll show you."

Garry was deeply struck. His humiliation was piteous. He made no rash promises, but he seemed shocked into realization that irreparable loss confronted him. In that moment Keven knew he would never go back on Garry, no matter what he did.

This incident, however, seemed to mark a change in their good fortunes. They had had their windfall, out of which Keven had squared his debt and saved a little, but Garry was broke. They fished on, day and night, with a steadily growing acquaintance with the goddess of ill fortune. Still the season was young; they would have time and opportunity to recoup.

One day, on the main street uptown, Keven encountered Atwell, face to face. The erstwhile major looked opulent and important. He gave Keven a malignant look and spoke to his companion, who was no other than the fox-faced superintendent of the leading cannery. Keven intuitively felt disaster in this meeting. He hurried back to camp and to his work.

Nothing happened, however, that day or the next. But after the third night, when he and Garry made the best haul for a good while, their fish were refused at the large factory, and they were compelled to sacrifice them at lesser price than was paid to any fishermen on the river. They saw Atwell's hand in this.

Days passed. The salmon run was at its height. Yet poor luck dogged Garry and Keven. Added to this was a act that did not at first dawn significantly upon them. Half a dozen crews, each working with two boats, were always in front of Garry and Keven, between them and the fish. They relayed their sets, jockeyed Garry out of position, blocked the incoming tide, as it were, and slowly but surely so hampered their fishing by night that only stubbornness kept them at it. Mulligan and his two cronies were the ringleaders.

"We're done, Garry," Keven said quietly.

"Done nothin'. An' if we are I'm

gonna get even," growled his partner.

"Well, from now on I'm going to spend more time snooping around."

"What fer?"

"I want to find out why big steelhead don't get up the river until after October first."

Keven, once yielding to the urge to get to the bottom of this complex market-fishing situation, regained the thrill and interest with which he had formerly worked. Sometimes, on dark nights, while Garry sat in the flatboat, holding a net rope, Keven would paddle around in his skiff. He ran close when he saw a net being hauled, and peered hard at the fishermen, particularly at the net and salmon. More than once he espied fishermen picking steelhead out of a net, to throw them back. At least they did so while he passed. But Keven wanted to look into these boats. After several encounters with Mulligan and his partners at work Keven was recognized.

"It's thet damn cub of Lord's," gruffly called out Mulligan.

Whereupon Keven rowed close to the boat, peering with all his eyes. "Got any whisky?" he asked. "My pardner is sick."

"Haw! Haw!" came a derisive laugh.

But Mulligan stood up with a long boat hook. "Git out of hyar, you sneak, er I'll sink thet skiff."

"Hullo," replied Keven. "I didn't know it was you, Mulligan. Excuse me."

"About time you was knowin' me. Keep out of my way."

"Say, you're all-fired touchy. Don't want any upriver fellows around when you're fishing, huh?" taunted Keven, rowing quickly away.

But Mulligan's deep and heavy voice carried far. "I told you, Bill. They're

spyin' on us. Thet young Bell ain't no market fisherman. It's high time they was run out."

"Shet up, you loud-mouthed fool," came the reply. "We don't own this river. An' don't play into..."

Keven heard no more, but that hardly seemed necessary. It was obvious there were reasons why Mulligan's crew did not care to be watched. Keven rowed back to Garry and related his experience.

"You stay away from thet gang, or I'll have to kill somebody," declared Garry. "You won't do no good, an' you won't find out nuthin'."

Keven vowed he would find out something, if there were anything. He had ascertained that the hauls of some fishermen, those high in favor, were disposed of at night, right after they were made, or at latest in the very early morning. He and Garry had never approached any of the cannery docks until after breakfast.

Whereupon Keven, sometimes late at night, left Garry to row back to camp while he went ashore, and made his stealthy way around the bay to the docks. Boatload after boatload of salmon did he espy, moored at the foot of the steps. All about them appeared regular and aboveboard. But on the third attempt, almost at dawn, he discovered another place where boats discharged their cargo. He heard the thud of fish falling upon the floor of the cannery. They were being pitched up from the boats.

Keven listened. Some of the fish fell soddenly, indicating plainly considerable weight. On the other hand the great majority struck lightly. These were not heavy fish. When he stole back into the woods, to retrace his steps toward camp, he believed he had found

out something. Yet it was imperative that he substantiate his suspicions by tangible proofs.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Durance Vile

KEVEN did not roll out until late next morning, and then he had to awaken Garry and pretend a cheerfulness he did not feel.

"Where'd you go this mornin' early?" asked Garry at breakfast.

"I was snooping around the canneries."

"Humph. Didn't I tell you to lay off thet stuff?"

"Garry, I'm sure on the track of something. And if I nail it—well, believe me, old man, I'll sure be a hero up the river."

"Ahuh—Kev, look who's a-comin'."

Keven glanced around to see two men get out of an automobile back on the road. One of them was the sheriff, Blackwood, who appeared to be talking forcibly to a thickset man wearing a wide hat.

"Thet's Rollins with Blacky," spoke up Garry.

"Who's Rollins?" queried Keven blankly.

"Rollins? He's the Grant's Pass constable, an' a sonuvabitch if I ever knowed one."

"Must be looking for your fishing partner, Garry. Here's where I do get it."

No more was said while the two approached. Blackwood wore a serious aspect. The other, a broad-featured man, was lined of face and calculating

of eye. As they reached the camp Blackwood took the lead.

"Bell, sorry to say I've got to put you under arrest," he said.

"All—right," replied Keven. "What's the charge?"

"Assault with intent to kill," announced Rollins in a loud voice, producing handcuffs. "Stick 'em out."

Blackwood waved them aside. "No irons needed on this boy."

"Is that so? I'm not goin' to risk bein' hit over the head."

"Mr. Blackwood, who's having me arrested?" asked Keven quickly.

"Order from Grant's Pass chief of police," replied Blackwood, producing a warrant. "Rollins, I'm puttin' Bell under arrest."

"Wal, all right. But I'm takin' him home on the stage."

"Are you? Not till you show papers. This order is for *me* to arrest Bell. An' I'll hold him till I get authority to do otherwise."

Garry slouched up. "Mister Rollins, who's makin' this charge?"

"None of your business, you loafin' river rat."

"He's my pardner. We're workin' together. We've got some rights. Here we've gone to considerable expense. An' if you take him away we're ruined. I gotta right to know who's behind this."

Rollins ignored the query, but Blackwood answered, "He told me Atwell had preferred the charge an' to push it to the limit of the law."

"Ahuh. Sure expected thet." Garry sat down as if suddenly helpless. As Blackwood led Keven away toward the car Garry spoke up: "So long, pard. Don't feel bad. This ain't nuthin'."

Keven got into the front seat of the Ford, as directed by the sheriff, who

evidently was the driver. The disgruntled officer from Grant's Pass stepped heavily into the back seat. Not a word was exchanged on the way up to the jail. Blackwood led Keven inside, through the office, to lock him in a cell. Then the officers began arguing.

"Blackwood, you can let me take Bell with me, if you want to."

"Reckon I could. An' I can keep him if I want to. That warrant reads to me. Well, I've arrested Bell. I've done my duty."

"Do I have to get special extradition papers from the governor to take this prisoner out of your jurisdiction?"

"Rollins, I've a hunch this is a trumped-up charge. Bell knocked Atwell down for talkin' against his good name. Brandeth and Atwell are pretty strong here, but they don't run this office."

"Man, you'll not enjoy your office much longer," retorted Rollins.

"Is that so? All the more reason to run it to suit myself."

"Then you refuse to give Bell up?"

"Sure, I refuse. I've arrested him because it's customary for a sheriff to act upon an order from another office. But the charge is ridiculous an'—"

"How do you know it is?" interrupted Rollins.

"Because Bell told me what he'd done. An' because I know Atwell."

"So that's the lay of the land. You've arrested Bell to keep me from arrestin' him."

"You couldn't arrest him, just for hittin' a man. Not in my county."

"The charge is assault. With intent to kill."

"Rats!" ejaculated Blackwood. "When you send me a state warrant for Bell, I'll give him up. Not before."

Rollins stamped out of the office.

For a day and a night Keven felt so warmly grateful to this stubborn champion that he scarcely realized the shame of his position. But that came soon enough. Day after day, and week after week, while he waited, he grew more dejected.

Meanwhile Garry Lord did not put in an appearance. Every day Keven looked for his partner to call and never failed to ask for him. Blackwood told Keven that Garry had been seen trolling on the bay, but he was not fishing with a net.

"Bell, look at this newspaper," said the sheriff one morning, after Keven had been in jail nearly three weeks. "There's a hitch over this warrant matter. I reckon they framed you. Atwell can't prove you did any more than knock him down."

Keven took the newspaper, which bore a Grant's Pass title and was a marked copy, evidently having arrived on yesterday's stage. With the blood beginning to beat at his temples he read about his unwarranted attack upon Gustave Atwell, one of the town's prominent citizens, about his arrest at Gold Beach, and of complications arising that threatened to involve two county governments. Then followed an extract from an interview with Atwell:

"The matter is not worth arguing, let alone annoying citizens of two towns who have much in common. Bell is a crippled, half-witted soldier who assaulted me because I made public the fact of his connection with the degradation of a family of five sisters: who lived near our training camp. He is certainly to be pitied. I recall the charge against him, except in case of his return to Grant's Pass, where I wish to be protected from further danger."

Keven ended the paragraph and then read it over. His hands shook the paper so he had utmost difficulty in concluding. "I'll kill him for that," he cried hoarsely. Blackwood unlocked the cell and placed a strong hand on his shoulder.

"Bell, don't take it so hard," he said. "Pretty rotten, I'd say. But don't sink under it. I reckon on the strength of Atwell's talk I can let you out. I'm going to do it, anyhow. Go back to your fishin', an' when the season's over stay away from Grant's Pass."

Keven slunk out of the jail, so crushed that he found no heart to voice his gratitude to this sturdy-minded sheriff. He went to the Sock-eye and drank and drank, clouding his brain without mitigating his suffering. Before he fell victim to drunkenness, however, Garry discovered him and dragged him back to camp. There in the darkness of the tent he lay throbbing and spent until sleep intervened.

When Keven awoke the sun was rising. He went outside, where Garry had keen and anxious eyes for him.

"Set down an' eat, Kev. There's fresh eggs an' ham."

Keven gazed around, beyond the campfire to the shining river, where at the moment ducks were swimming and salmon rolling.

"How have the fish been running, Garry?" he asked presently.

"Fine. Second big run, steady for days. No big hauls made. Jest consistent good fishin'. Bay's full of steel-head. They're pilin' upriver to beat the band. That is—them thet git by."

"Garry, the nets shouldn't stop steel-head."

"No, they shouldn't," said Garry, with noncommittal air. "How'd you git out of jail, Kev?"

"Blackwood let me go. Here—read this," said Keven, handing his partner the piece of newspaper he had torn out.

Garry scanned the printed page and burst into the profanity of a riverman.

"Kev, you can't let thet stand," he said. "If you do, folks will believe it. Not everybody, but 'most everybody. No, shree, you jest can't stand fer thet newspaper roast."

"I don't intend to," returned Keven with cold dark grimness.

"Kev, I reckon I'd hosswhip him within an inch of his life."

"Garry, it'd be a good idea—if it were enough."

"Hell, man, are you thinkin' of killin' Atwell?"

Keven had no reply for that. Perhaps his cold tight face made words superfluous.

"Kev! See here, you lay off any serious intent on Atwell," flashed the riverman. "'Cause, by Gord, if you don't, I'll kill him myself."

Keven had never seen Garry look or talk like this. Strange little flecks danced in eyes as clear and intense as blue steel. A tremendous loyalty to his friend seemed to emanate from him.

"Very well, Garry, I'll lay off such intent—if I had it," returned Keven earnestly. Garry must be deceived at any cost.

"I ain't so damn sure about you," said Garry. "Kev Bell, you oughta have some sense. If you haven't, I gotta have some fer you. We've been screwed good an' hard on this market fishin'. But thet ain't nuthin'. Nuthin' a-tall. You can find better an' easier work. Huntin' fer gold back up the river! Thet'd be fine. I'll take a crack at it with you next winter, if you want to. Kev, you're gonna git well again."

Keven laughed. "Garry, you're getting softening of the brain."

"Nope. It's somethin' I feel, Kev, an' can't explain. You're gonna come out all right in the end, Kev."

An unquenchable loyalty and faith and something even greater shone from the eyes of the riverman. Keven dropped his head before this improvident roisterer, whose soul was bigger than his.

"Look there! By gosh," ejaculated Garry, pointing out across where the river flowed into the bay. Fishermen were rowing by in big boats heaped high with shining salmon.

"Another run on!" cried Keven eagerly.

"Sure. An' there's other boats going' out. Well, ding the luck! I knowed there'd be a big run. Yestiddy I had it figured. I could have beat them yaps to it."

"Why didn't you, then!" queried Keven. "It's tough for one man to set and haul a net, I know. But you've done it."

Garry gave him a queer glance and, without another word, stalked away in the direction of the canneries. Keven did not know what to make of this. Garry not fishing when the bay was full of salmon! Could he have gotten drunk and sold the net? No, for there it hung on their rack above the river. Keven stared. Somehow it did not appear natural. He walked out to investigate. Limp, ragged, gray as ashes!

"I'll be damned! Rotten!" he ejaculated in dismay, and took hold of the netting. It fell to pieces, as if the twine were a thousand years old. Keven strode along the rack, feeling the net here and there, until the truth dawned upon him. Some kind of destroying

agent, probably sulphuric acid, had been poured upon that net.

Long he waited for Garry to return, brooding in the shade of the big pine that sheltered the tent. And his righteous anger alternated with grief. At length his partner came back.

"Biggest salmon ketch this year," announced Garry simply.

"Garry, what was it that ruined our net?" demanded Keven.

"Sulphuric acid."

"I guessed that. Who could have done it?"

"I reckon it was Mulligan who got one of his half-breeds to do that little job."

"But do you know? Can you lay it onto him? Have you any proof?"

"Nary proof. I went to the store an' found out that they hadn't no acid. I asked the stage drivers an' nuthin' had come up with them."

"Did you inquire on the freight boat?"

"That hasn't been in lately."

"What have you been doing?"

"Trollin' every day. Ketched a few salmon right along. I reckon we can make wages."

"All right. We'll stick at it. But what we want to do most is to get something on these men."

"You're talkin' gospel, Kev."

"Garry, is it reasonable to connect Atwell with our misfortunes here?" asked Keven.

"It sure don't seem reasonable. But hell! He'd be low enough."

"Garry, we can be slick enough to get the goods on them," declared Keven, fiercely resolute.

"Sure, we oughta be. But what'll we do then?"

"I want to rile the people up the river. And through them the whole

state. Throw the rottenness of it all into the Portland courts!"

"You're talkin' big."

"Garry, it's more important to the people upriver," declared Keven. "These folks here can get sea fish. But if the runs are blocked the farmers and townspeople all along the Rogue are going to suffer. They eat fish during the season and smoke them for winter use. Then take the fly-fishermen. Are a few men to be allowed to kill the food value and the sport value of this river?"

"Hell, no, if you can stop them."

"Garry, people can be awakened into revolt," expostulated Keven.

CHAPTER NINE

A Blade and the Tide

OUT on the bay, where it narrowed to the river mouth, the green of salt water, coming in with the tide, met the darker bluish-green water of the Rogue. While Garry rowed like a machine, Keven let his line back to drag the bright lure along the merging of currents. This day salmon ran large and plentiful. Smash! and the line would whiz through his hands. The strike never failed to make him jump. Then followed the short battle, always ending when a gasping salmon was hauled over the gunwales.

"Somethin' doin' today," said Garry for the tenth time, and he grinned his pleasure.

No day this season had yet compared with this one. But few boats were out, and none of the Indian fishermen. Keven had the trolling at the mouth all to himself. By the time the tide had pushed the river back, to occupy the bay,

he had half loaded the skiff with salmon. And even then the trolling remained good.

"Jest happened we hit it right," said Garry philosophically. "Reckon it won't happen again, wuss luck. We could make fair money at this rate."

"Garry, you're like me. You'd fish for nothing—Wow!"

"By gosh, you've hung a lunker. Let him run."

"He's taking all the line. Say, what a strike! Garry, row after him. I'll bet this is the granddad of the bunch."

It developed, at length, that he had indeed hooked a mighty Chinook. Ordinarily a forty-pound salmon would tow the light skiff for quite a while. But this one pulled it fast and failed to tire.

"If he heads out to sea we jest ain't a-goin', Kev," declared Garry.

"We'll follow him to Kamchatka," retorted Keven.

Meanwhile the sun had gone down over the wide ridged expanse of ocean, which Keven could see out across the narrow mouth. Already shadows were forming under the low sand dunes, and near shore on the north side the water had begun to glance and gleam darkly.

"Ain't you ever goin' to land thet Chinook?" queried Garry. "I'm 'most starved. Hoss him in, Kev."

"Thunder and blazes!" ejaculated Keven, aghast. "He's making for that net."

"Better cut him loose."

"What? Like hell I will."

"Kev, if I ain't mistook, thet's one of Mulligan's nets. He an' his gang have gall enough to set nets an' leave 'em. Somethin' we upriver fishermen never dared do—Ahuh, your fish is fast."

"Yes, dang it. But I'll get him or bust."

"Better cut him loose, Kev," repeated Garry soberly.

"Say, pard, are you afraid?" asked Keven, derisive in his excitement.

"Hell, if you put it that way," rejoined Garry, offended, and he backed the skiff toward where the net buoy bobbed on the surface.

Meanwhile Keven hauled in the slack line, which led them somewhat to the right of the buoy. Keven directed his partner to row close to the buoy, so that he could pick up the net rope. Soon he was hauling on the net and at the same time taking in his hand line. With a lunge and a roar the huge Chinook came up. That flurry was apparently his last, for he turned his great, broad shiny side up, and gaped with the jaws of an enormous wolf.

"Help, Garry," panted Keven, as he tried to lift the salmon.

"Tip the skiff an' slide him in," replied Garry.

Between them they got the fish into the skiff, where it lay gasping, the most marvelous salmon Keven had ever seen.

"Oh! What'll he go?"

"Some lunker!" ejaculated Garry. "Sixty-five, mebbe seventy pounds."

The big spoon had become entangled in the net, and as Keven extricated it, with some difficulty, Garry suddenly burst out, hoarsely: "By Gord! Look at that net!"

"What? It's all right. I've got the hook free. No damage done."

"Look at that mesh!" exclaimed Garry, low and sharp.

Keven gazed from Garry back to the net, a fold of which dragged over his knee. Puzzled, he lifted it—spread it wide.

"Four-inch mesh!" he whispered.

"Sure as you're borned," corroborated Garry.

"And the law allows only an eight-inch mesh?"

"The law allows! Haw! Haw! But that's the law, Kev."

"Garry, we've got it on them."

"Lemme look." Then Garry reached over to spread the folds, sliding them back into the water, until he came to a line of heavier twine and larger mesh. The top of the net had a border of mesh which conformed with the existing law.

"Thet top is only a blind," went on Garry. "Look out! A boat comin'."

Garry flipped the top line back into the water, and sitting back to his oars, he added, "Stand up an' be liftin' thet salmon."

Keven did as he was bidden, while Garry rowed. A few strokes took them out from the shadow cast by the sand dunes. Still they could easily have been seen before that, if the approaching boatman had been looking. As his back was turned, however, there was a chance that they had not been observed.

"Hey, look out where you're goin'," bawled Garry, in quite unnecessary alarm, for the fisherman was some rods off. He backed water with his oars and then turned to look.

"Can't you see when a feller's on a fish?" went on Garry loudly, as Keven made as if he had just that instant hauled the Chinook aboard.

"Hey yourself," replied the fisherman gruffly. "Hev you been foolin' round my—" He checked himself and added, "hyar?"

"Naw, we haven't been foolin' round nuthin'," replied Garry, just as gruffly. "We was landin' this Chinook an' thought you'd run us down."

Keven dropped the fish with a great flop, and then flopped down himself. No easy task had it been to hold up that weight.

Dusk had settled down over the river when they arrived at their mooring. Keven hurried to camp and started a fire, while Garry attended to the catch. Sometimes he made a deal with Stemm to dispose of it. Soon he came slopping up the path, to sit down before the tent and kick off his rubber boots.

"Seventy-one pounds," he announced.

"You weighed him? Say, didn't I tell you? What wouldn't I have given to catch that Chinook on a rod! Seventy-one pounds!"

Between them they got supper with little or no unnecessary conversation. Keven waited patiently for his partner to speak, but that did not happen until the meal was finished.

"One way or another we got it on them!" suddenly Garry burst out.

"Ahuh!" agreed Keven. That was exactly what his conclusion had been.

"Pard, I swear I've long suspected that very thing, but honest — I never seen a net like that before," declared Garry. "An' now I *know* why big steelhead seldom or never show up the river till after October first. I think mebbe there's many such nets. I think Mulligan an' his crew are back of that. Mebbe the whole damned ring. I think they sell every little fish they ketch — an' not to the natives up in the hills to smoke fer winter. I think it's rottener than hell."

"My, what a stink it will make! What a row up the river! Garry, I'm tickled pink," raved Keven.

"Kev, we can't lay that onto the canneries. It could never be proved. They'd make the fishermen the goats. But that's nuthin'."

"We don't need to implicate the canneries," declared Keven intensely. "All we need is to show evidence why the salmon and steelhead run fewer up the river."

"By Gord, Kev, you're right. If we can steal that net full of small jacks an' silversides an' steelhead, we'll raise such hell that it'll ring all over Oregon. Blackwood is honest. He couldn't be bought. If we steal that net with fish in it, by gosh, he'll make it hot for these fishermen. When our chance comes we'll cut the anchors loose, keepin' the buoy, an' we'll pile the net into the skiff an' beat it fer shore. All we gotta do is to keep from bein' ketched in the act."



IT TURNED OUT during the next few days that that particular fishing locality in which Keven and Garry were especially interested was never without fishermen on it. At dawn boats were everywhere; during the day no safe opportunity presented; from sunset to dark appeared to be the time in which they were going to get their chance.

They fished early and late and, contrary to their expectations, caught as many salmon as the trolling Indians. This was killing two birds with one stone, and they were jubilant. But one morning Garry returned from the canneries to inform Keven that they no longer had any market for their fish, unless they would sell to Priddy for ten cents a fish.

"Think of thet. A dime fer a big salmon," declared Garry wrathfully. "A measly ten cents fer an hour's hard work! Kev, it's plain as print. The little cannery is broke. They'll take our fish if we'll trust 'em to pay. I heerd Atwell has now got interest in the Smith factory. An' of course Priddy's offer is an insult. What'll we do, pard?"

"Take our fish to Smith. It's no matter whether he pays us or not. But we don't want these fishermen to see us out there, trolling day in and day out, with absolutely no market for our fish. That'd give us away."

Garry agreed, and now in settled conviction of the wrong done them, and in growing wrath, they returned to their profitless work. Garry drank steadily. He always had a bottle, from what source Keven did not know. And Keven drank, too, more than was good for him. Garry had long been without money, and Keven's was fast disappearing. Their supplies were low and they had no credit because the store belonged to the interests that were hounding them off the river.

"We can't hold out much longer. We gotta swipe thet net quick," Garry kept saying.

One August afternoon storm clouds appeared over the mountains. The sultry atmosphere heralded rain, but it was slow in coming. Sunset had a red, smoky, sinister aspect.

"Kev, we're gonna git our chance," averred Garry, as they shoved off. "The tide's runnin' hell-bent fer election. An' there'll be a storm bustin' soon. Row straight across," he directed as he took up the coiled trolling line.

A gold-red glow suffused the western sky and was reflected in the quiet waters of the bay. Northward, up the river, the sky was black as ink, illu-

minated now and then by flares of lightning.

"There's one boat, with two fellers," said Garry, pointing. "Rowin' in. Pull easy, like we was trollin'. Tide's runnin' out, an' a storm's a-comin'. There won't be no fishermen out there a-tall."

A darkening of the afterglow, sudden and striking, changed the beautiful effect of sky and water. The lights were dying. An ominous calm, a menacing silence, lay like a blanket over the country. It was broken by low muttering thunder from the mountains and the answering roar of the sea. Wavering and dark the sand dunes began to loom against that fast-fading dusky gold in the west.

"Pretty black under them dunes," whispered Garry. "A boat could be hid along there. But we ain't got time to look. Coast is clear. Turn now, Kev, an' pull — There. We're in line with our landmark."

Keven sent the skiff gliding swiftly. An unearthly glow came from the last fire in the heavens. Weirdly it lighted the surface of the bay. A faint soft breeze struck Keven's heated face. Jagged forks of lightning shot down from that black pall to the north.

"Slow. I see the buoy," whispered Garry. "Left — a little. Now stop. Slip the oars behind you, so you can grab them quick — Quiet, Kev! Sound carries far a night like this."

Keven had thumped the gunwale with an oar. The skiff glided smoothly. Garry reached far out. Then Keven saw him catch the buoy.

"Cut her free, Kev, while I haul," went on Garry, standing up.

Grasping the big fish knife, Keven leaned forward behind Garry and slashed the anchor rope. It twanged. It let go. Garry lifted the buoy into the

skiff and began to drag the net likewise.

"Let 'er swing, Kev. Gee! What you make of that?"

The net held many wiggling steel-head, just gilled, and salmon under size. Garry hauled powerfully, dropping the wet folds into the skiff. Keven laid the knife down to help. While they slowly drifted with the tide, downstream and inshore, they gathered in net and fish, to pile them at their feet.

"Here's the end, Kev. Cut the rope — By Gord, the job's done."

Keven straightened up, knife in hand, his back to the shadow cast by the sand dunes. His heart beat high. He was about to second Garry's husky whisper of triumph when a slight noise froze him. The skiff was drifting. Garry had just lifted the trailing anchor rope aboard. Had he been accountable for that sound? A gurgling, sucking dip? It had been made by an oar. Warily Keven sought to turn.

"Look out Kev!" shouted Garry, and leaped to shove Keven back. His up-flung arms went protectingly above Keven's head.

"Ketched you net thieves!" rasped out a voice, thick with fury.

"Aye, Mulligan — you blackhearted half-breed!" returned Garry fiercely.

A boat thumped hard against the skiff. Then came a swish. Keven saw a dark descending object, over him. A terrible sodden thud! Garry fell over the seat into the bow.

"Take that, you upriver bastard!"

Mulligan's boat bumped against the skiff, bringing the burly fisherman somewhat forward of Keven, yet within reach. Mulligan lifted the long oar over the prostrate Garry. Like a tiger Keven leaped. With all his might he swung the fish knife. He drove it into

Mulligan's burly neck. Hot blood squirted over his hand before he could let go. A horrible hoarse, strangled cry rent the air. Mulligan plunged overboard, his oar striking the boat and sliding off.

Keven had lost his equilibrium. The skiff had been overbalanced. Water was pouring in over the net. Then he plunged, face forward, into the bay. The icy shock aided rather than hindered his desperate lunging up, to where he could breathe again and see.

The skiff had righted, but the gunwale was only a few inches above water. He dared not attempt to clamber aboard. It had been caught by the current. Keven grasped the bow and held on.

Then as he peered back a lightning flash showed the other boat, black on the white water, drifting down. There was no sign of Mulligan. He had sunk.

Keven saw one of Garry's arms hanging limp over the gunwale. Holding fast, keeping the skiff trim, Keven peered about. They had drifted from the bay into the mouth of the river. Like a millrace the outgoing tide carried the skiff toward the outlet. Nearer sounded the crash of the breakers. Keven began to kick, and to paddle with his free arm. Gradually the skiff swung toward the sandspit. He could discern the pale gray point, lashed by that sliding tide.

Suddenly his feet touched bottom. He waded, desperately clinging to the bow. The skiff swung broadside. Then the tremendous current tore it from his grasp. He lunged, but the current beat him. The boat gleamed against the dim white waves — swept on — disappeared. And the tide dragged at him. Frantically he plunged and clawed his way out on the sandspit, where he fell.

CHAPTER TEN

Out of the Past

OVERCOME by horror and exertion, Keven lay on the sand, his face upturned to the oncoming storm. At length

he sat up, panting, wet, trembling.

"Oh, my — God!" he cried in dreadful realization. "He's gone!"

Even if Garry were alive when the skiff drifted out he would soon be drowned in those wild waters. Mulligan had sunk. He would drift out to sea. But the sea gave up its dead. It would cast the half-breed up with that knife stuck in his neck. Keven would be branded a murderer.

The instinct to escape arose in him. Staggering up, he gazed fearfully at the pale sand beach, across the gloomy bay toward the town. Thunder was crashing nearer. When the lightning flashed he saw boats with the dark figures of men. Fishermen at their nets! They might find Mulligan's drifting empty boat. He slunk over on the seaside of the beach until he drew under cover of the wooded hill, when he swung around to the bay shore again. No person saw him reach camp.

It was in his mind to go up the river. He packed a small bag of biscuits, cooked meat, dried fruit. He donned his rubber coat, which had the wool lining. Then he removed it and also his wet shirt. Finding his remaining one, he put that on, and the coat over it. But he would not leave the wet shirt behind. It might somehow be a clue. What else would he take? As he stripped off a blanket from the bed, Garry's gun fell out from under the pillow. Keven heard it, then felt it.

He would make his way up the river trail to Grant's Pass and kill Atwell before he was caught. All the passion and hate, the bitter consciousness of foul wrong done him, welled up to fix in grim, unalterable decision. Rolling the blanket lengthwise, he slung it over his shoulder.

He peered through the gloom. A dim light shone in Stemm's cabin. Keven strode off silently, got by the few remaining fishermen's shacks.

It would be necessary to cross the river. On the opposite side a road led up some miles, he did not know how many, to the government trail. He could cross a wide rocky island bar some distance upstream.

Flashes of lightning aided him to make his way along the shore. Drops of rain splashed on his face. He found the rocky bar and made out the island.

He crossed without difficulty, but had trouble over the boulders and through the brush. He pressed on to come out into the road. Then the thunder crashed and the clouds burst. Heavy, warm rain flooded down. He welcomed it. His tracks would be washed out. He strode on through the downpour.

Keven had little hope of ultimate escape. All he asked were days enough to make the long tramp up the river and to consummate his revenge. Still, he might escape after killing Atwell, to flee into the fastnesses of the Rogue wilderness, where he could never be apprehended and captured.

He strode on through the storm, hour after hour. In the gray of morning he came to the end of the road. A house and some cabins marked this terminal. From there the government trail climbed to the mountainside above the river. The rain fell steadily.

Toward noon the rain ceased and the clouds began to lift. Long before he reached it, he espied the hamlet of Agness, which he recognized by the white suspension bridge that spanned the river. Here he plunged into the woods and made a wide detour, to come out on the trail far beyond.

Late that afternoon he came out into a widening of the valley in which Illahe was located. It consisted of a few scattered outlying farms and a few houses clustered together near the river. This detour took longer, but at last he came out again on the trail. Dusk overtook him, and he made off the trail into a pine thicket. He felt too weary to eat, yet he forced himself. When he rolled in the blanket night seemed to shut out his senses.

When he became conscious of them again the forest was full of golden light and slanting rays. When he attempted to move there followed only a painful spasm of his muscles. They were stiff. He had driven himself to the limit and then had slept in wet clothes and blanket. It required effort to roll over and get up on his hands and knees, then to stand up.

Moving about a bit, he discovered that some animal had overturned his canvas bag, to make off with his little store of food. It dawned upon him that he was only eight miles from Aard's cabin at Solitude, and Aard was a man he would not be afraid to trust. Rolling his blanket and taking up the bag, he turned south.

Soon the trail emerged on a high slope above the river. It was in turgid flood, bank-full, covering the rocks, swinging swiftly around the green gap above and sliding the same way out of sight below.

Toiling on, and resting often, he cov-

ered a few miles. The sun now shone hot; the leaf-strewn trail had become dry; from the slopes floated up the sweet fragrance of myrtle, and the pungent odor from patches of pinewoods clogged his nostrils.

The trail entered what appeared to be a green tunnel under the forest, shady, silent, drowsy in the noonday heat. Presently hoofbeats vibrated on Keven's sensitive nerves. Stealthily as an Indian he slipped into the brush, to crouch in a shaded covert, his heart thumping, the roof of his mouth dry.

Tramp of hoofs, merry whistles, rough gay voices of men, swelled upon Keven's ears. Soon he caught a glimpse of packers going down the trail with their pack train. These were half-breeds, happy and carefree. When they had passed on out of hearing he entered the trail again.

Mid-afternoon found him within sight of the great V-shaped valley which marked the entrance to Solitude. The trail descended, crossing the old flumes left by the miners who had long years before passed on, leaving these eloquent reminders of their dream, of their passion.

Sight of Solitude brought something nameless back to him. The mile-long channel, the cliff wall, the foaming bend, the dark bench of tan oaks across the river, the tranquil and unbroken solitude — was that dimming his eyes? High above him in the fir tops moaned the wind, the restful sound, the song of the trees. He surrendered to he knew not what. It would be better for him to plunge into the river and find peace there under the lichened shelving cliffs. He had courage to do that — but a hellish resolve had clutched him. He had been trained to kill and he would kill.

Keven shouldered his burdens and plodded on. The trail wound among huge mossy boulders, skirted the sandy shore, went on into the brown-matted and pine-scented forest, to emerge in the open above the bench where Aard lived. Keven saw two cabins; he heard the ring of an ax; he saw a curling column of blue smoke. Aard must be home. Keven meant to rest awhile, ask some food of this backwoodsman, tell him nothing, and go on to the fulfillment of his last task.

The deep bay of a hound startled him. He went down the sunlit, shadow-barred trail, coming out suddenly into the colorful open. Asters bloomed along the path, in the clean hard-packed sand on which Keven caught a trace of little moccasin tracks. The first cabin stood on the river end of the clearing. Back of it fenced gardens and orchards reached to the mountain slope. Beyond this cabin, and higher, stood the other.

The hound bayed again, and a chorus of yelps and barks from lesser dogs filled the air. A voice silenced them. Keven directed his gaze back to the first cabin. Someone stood on the porch surrounded by dogs.

Keven halted to sit down on a huge log that lay between the path and the edge of the clearing. He was spent, and he laid aside his burdens and removed his cap.

Suddenly a sweet, piercing cry rent the silence. Keven jerked up in startled surprise. A girl came running swiftly down the path, followed by the dogs.

"Kev? Oh, Kev?" she screamed.

He stared. She came flying on winged feet, her dark face and dark hair shining in the sunlight.

"Oh, Kev! I thought you'd — never, never — come back," she panted, and reaching him on the run, she clasped

her arms round him and held him close, her head over his shoulder, her face against his. "But, thank God — you did come. I *knew* you would someday."

Keven essayed to find his voice, but in vain. He doubted his senses. For a moment he was as if almost paralyzed, his thoughts hopelessly jumbled.

Then she released him and stood erect, her hands on his shoulders. He could see her now — strong, beautiful face, smooth and clear-skinned, with scarlet showing under the golden tan.

"You nearly broke my heart, Kev," she said.

Keven racked his clouded brain. "Aren't — haven't you — mistaken me — for someone else?"

"Kev Bell!" she cried reproachfully.

"You have my name pat. But who —"

"Don't you know me?" she interrupted, deeply hurt and shocked.

"I — I'm afraid not."

"I am Beryl," she said simply.

Beryl? That name knocked at the gate of closed associations. "Beryl! Beryl who?"

"Aard, of course. You're teasing me! It's mean of you — almost as mean as your going by here last May without stopping to see me."

"I'm sorry, Miss —"

"Miss! How can you call me that? How can you sit there sober-faced, making me feel ridiculous — when I — I'm dying to be kissed?"

Keven gazed at her more bewildered than ever. "Well, I wouldn't let any girl die for want of so simple a thing," he said, sparring for time. "But I — I see you are earnest. And I just can't place you."

"Oh, it must be true, then," she cried poignantly. "You don't remember me!"

"Ought I to?" asked Keven.

"Indeed you ought, unless you've become a fickle, faithless soldier."

"I assure you I'm not that. But if you had said a crippled, broken soldier, you'd be right. I was injured by the bursting of a gun. I lay in a camp hospital for months. I'm nearly blind in one eye. My lower jaw was blown off. See the scars on my lip and chin? Then I suffered other injury to my head, and so my memory fails sometimes. That must be why I don't remember you — if it's true that I should."

Her face blanched, her eyes dilated and softened, expressing unutterable sorrow, her red lips quivered. And her hands went with exquisite tenderness to his chin and cheek, and then over his brow, finally to run through his hair and to lock back of his neck. Then she kissed his cheek and drew back.

"Kev, does *that* help — you to remember?" she asked.

"I — yes — that is, the way you mussed my hair — somehow I — I sort of remember that," he replied in tremendous embarrassment.

"Kev," she went on earnestly. "I didn't know how you'd suffered. I will come back to you presently."

"If you'll let me ask you questions, perhaps that might help."

"Ask away — Kev, you smiled then for the first time!"

"You're Aard's daughter?" began Keven.

"Of course. I was born in that cabin. My mother died last winter."

"I remember Solitude better than any other place on the river," went on Keven. "I have been here twice, fishing. Once for what must have been a good while. You must have been here when I stayed with Aard that last time."

"Yes, Kev, I was here," she replied

wistfully. "I spent every hour of the livelong day with you — and often far into the night."

"Did — I —?" asked Keven haltingly, almost afraid to go on. "But weren't you a — a mere child?"

"I was not. I was sixteen years old and large for my age," she returned emphatically.

"Did — did I make love to you?"

"Terribly — no girl ever had such wonderful love made to her."

"Did I kiss you, Beryl?"

"Did you?" she trilled happily. "You teased me, coaxed me, begged me for one little kiss — and when I gave in you took ten thousand."

"It seems I must have been — wild and bold," he continued, gravely trying to meet her black eyes. "I hope — I — I didn't lay a hand on you."

"Kev Bell! Your memory *is* gone. You laid *two* hands on me — and if you'd had a third that wouldn't have been enough."

Keven felt the hot blood sting his cheeks. What had he done to this girl?

She touched his head with gentle hand and smoothed his hair. "Don't feel badly about *that*, Kev," she returned in shy earnestness. "I — I loved you. And you did me no harm. Only you made me worship you — made me so I could never look at another boy — made me wait and wait for you to come back."

"Did I promise to come back?"

"Yes. I waited and prayed — knowing you'd come back to me someday. Oh, how long — the weeks, the months, the years! No news! No letter! I went to Roseburg, to my aunt's. There I attended school. Vacation times I came home. I ran wild. I fished, I hunted, I chopped wood, I worked. But I couldn't be happy. I longed for you. Then when Mother died Dad fetched me home."

"Tell me something more about what I did, when I was here that last time," said Keven.

"Oh, there are a million things," she jubilated. "We climbed the trails. We used to watch the deer in the oak groves. We gathered flowers and ferns. We used to wash the sand for gold. I have a little vial full of gold dust that we washed. But the river was your god. I was jealous of the river. You loved it best, and then the water ouzels and the steelhead. All the time since you've been away, while I was home, when I heard the ouzels in the mornings and evenings I would cry."

"Water ouzels? These little birds that build their nests under the cliffs, so when their young ones hatch they'll fall in the water?"

"Yes, yes, Kev," she cried eagerly. "Don't you remember how I first took you to the rock ledges where the steelhead lay? No one ever knew them but Dad and I. But I showed you. Don't you remember one lovely morning that I saw a big steelhead rising? And I showed you where. You cast and cast. The old sockdolager rose up and fastened to that fly. Then he leaped — a monster. And he took you down around the bend. You ran, you waded, you swam the river over and back again, while I flew and screamed along the bank. Oh, don't you remember, Kev? How I met you at the head of the rapids where you lost him? Your rod was broken and so was your heart. It was then, Kev, that I gave you my first kiss."

A door seemed to jar and shock back on the dim threshold of that closed chamber in Keven Bell's brain. He saw again that monster rose-and-silver trout, leaping and tearing down the swift river. He saw again a girl, black-eyed and blackhaired, flying barefooted

over the sand and stones, screaming in wild abandon.

"Beryl, I remember — I remember!" he exclaimed, his eyes closed. The next instant the girl was on his breast, weeping, crying out her thanksgiving. Instinctively, unconsciously his arms closed round her.

It was she who released herself. "Dad is away from home," she said. "He goes to Portland sometimes. He said he would stop over at Gold Beach to see you. Oh, won't he be glad!"

The horror of the fate that had overtaken Keven swept over him.

"You are pale — tired. You look so strange," she said tremulously.

"I'm all in, Beryl," he replied suddenly weak. "I wasn't strong — and I walked too far. Then I slept in my wet things and it cramped me. I'm starved too."

"Oh dear! And here I've been wearing you out with my fury!"

She led him toward the cabin. He espied an Indian woman peering at them from the porch. Keven caught the odor of a wood fire and baking bread. He seemed powerless to resist though he knew he should flee like a madman into the forest.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Mountain Magic

KEVEN woke to the sweet, wild, plaintive notes of a water ouzel outside the open window of the cabin where

he had slept. He gazed around the cabin. It had not been used as a habitation of late. It smelled like the pinewoods. A chair and table made of boughs were the only other

pieces of furniture. An open fireplace and chimney of gray stone occupied the center of the back wall.

What was he to do? The answer struck harshly. He had to go on, the moment he was able. A day's rest perhaps would fit him to travel. Yet — this Beryl Aard! He had made love to her, never thinking that she might take him seriously. Then he had gone home to fall victim to Rosamond Brandeth. Now he was a fugitive.

There came a light footfall upon the porch. Someone knocked.

"Keven — are you awake?" followed the query, in Beryl's rich voice, eager, expectant.

"Yes. But that's about all," he replied.

She entered carrying a box-lid tray with his breakfast. She wore white, that brought out vividly her dark beauty. Her brown ankles were bare. On her feet she wore deerskin moccasins. She set the tray upon the table and moved it to his bedside.

"Are you hungry? You couldn't eat last night."

"No. I'm just sunk," he replied.

She felt his cheeks and brow with a cool hand, and smoothing back his hair she sat down on the bed.

"You have fever. Try to eat a little," she entreated.

Keven struggled to a sitting posture, placed a pillow to his back and the tray upon his lap. Blackberries and cream, ham and eggs, toast and coffee, discovered to him that he was famished. While he ate she watched him gravely.

"You were hungry," she said. "Kev, I think you have fever."

"Might have any old thing, but I reckon it's only a cold. I'll get up after a little and mozy around."

When she took the tray her hand came into contact with his, and again her touch gave him a magnetic thrill.

"Kev, you look ill—troubled," she said, standing beside him.

"I am, both, I guess. Beryl, I learned to drink in the army hospital. It deadened my pain. At Gold Beach I drank more and more. I reckon it gave me false strength. I've had no liquor for two days. This morning I need some badly. But I don't want it . . . I shall—never—drink—again."

"That makes me very happy. I hate drink," she returned. "Before I came home I saw a good deal of it at Roseburg. My aunt kept an inn. Major Atwell, who spoke so vilely of you in the paper, he came there with a girl named Brandeth, from Grant's Pass. Did you know her?"

"Rosamond Brandeth? Yes, I used to know her," replied Keven steadily. "What next would this girl reveal?"

"He got her quite tipsy," went on Beryl. "Then, after that, Major Atwell came frequently, alone. He tried to make up to me, Kev."

"I heard Atwell was a devil among the women. How did he make out with you?"

She laughed. "He didn't make out at all. The minute I realized he was after me—I'm a stupid little country girl, Kev—I never showed myself again. Soon after that I came home for good."

"Beryl, you read what Atwell said about me assaulting him?" queried Keven.

"Dad told me. I'm ashamed to admit I was tickled. But I was wild with rage over Atwell's implicating you in—the Carstone scandal."

"Then you didn't take it—seriously?" gulped Keven.

"I knew you could never be mixed

up in anything like that," she replied. "Kev, is that what's troubling you?"

"Yes, a little. Atwell had me arrested at Gold Beach. I was in jail a month. He had hatched up a case on me. But it fell through. Somebody upstate must be wise to Atwell, for he couldn't get the papers necessary to move me out of Curry County."

"In jail—a month!" she gasped. "Soon after you arrived there?"

"Yes. And afterward I was no good."

"I wondered why you didn't write me. How often I rode to Merrill, in hopes I'd get a letter! None ever came."

"Garry and I did well at first," went on Keven. "We were market fishing. But the fishermen at Gold Beach destroyed our net. Then we took to trolling. And last they either refused our fish or offered a miserable price. And, Beryl, Major Atwell backed those fishermen, egged them on to drive us out."

"So he's been hounding you? The beast!"

"Beryl, my trouble is—I killed a man," burst out Keven, meaning to tell all.

She sank to her knees by his bedside. "Kev!"

"It's true. A fisherman named Mulligan," replied Keven hoarsely. "Jabbed my fish knife in his throat. But I wasn't—I'm not sorry."

"My God!" She clasped him with fiercely protective hands.

Keven pulled her twining arms from round his neck. "But it was self-defense, Beryl. I'm no murderer. He was beating down my partner, Garry. I think he killed him. Beryl, let me tell you the whole story."

She sank back upon her knees, and fixed great eyes upon him.

Keven began with his attack upon Atwell, and went on with the fight

down the river, the market fishing, the jail episode, the underground process which wore him and Garry down, their resort to hook-and-line fishing in order to live, its utter failure, and then the discovery of the net with the four-inch mesh, and at last the terrible fight on the river in the dusk of the gathering storm and his escape.

"Oh, Kev," she whispered. "You should give yourself up. Your innocence will come out. You have friends to fight for you."

"I'd die before I'd go to jail again," his voice rang out. "Atwell is too strong. He and Brandeth run the fisheries. They'd frame me. They have money, political pull. They'd stop at nothing. I'd have no chance. They'd hang me!"

"Don't—don't! Keven, are you honest with me? If your enemies are so strong, why then were you rushing to Grant's Pass?"

She fixed him with accusing eyes. "You were not coming here to hide," she hurried on. "You were not only escaping. Kev, you mean to kill the man who has ruined you!"

Keven could neither deny nor confess. She leaned over to grip his hands.

"Listen to me, Kev Bell. I know a place high up the mountain—a cave by the stream. You could live there for years and no one would ever know. I could see you every day. We could roam over the mountains. You could hunt. You could trap fur, you could prospect for gold. It would be safe sometimes for you to come down to the river and fish for steelhead. And all the while, Kev, the truth of your innocence would be working out. Something will happen to save you. Oh, trust me, darling, for I know. I feel it here."

Keven had closed his eyes, blinded

by the loving spirit shining upon him. Something black and hideous seemed to loosen and pass out of him, leaving him free.

"Beryl, I will stay," he whispered, "and you can hide me. I meant to kill him. You have turned me."

She laid her head on his breast. A wild chorus of yelps and barks sounded outside.

"Dad!" cried Beryl joyfully, leaping up to run to the door.

"Are you sure?" asked Keven.

"I know what the dogs say, Kev," she answered. "There, it is Dad. He's alone. There's nothing to alarm you."

"Please bring him here, but don't tell him anything except that I'm here."

Keven propped himself up in bed, as if to prepare himself. Aard would have the news from Gold Beach; and Keven shuddered at what that might be. Then he heard voices, approaching steps. Beryl flashed into the cabin, radiant of face. Then the tall form of Aard darkened the door, and his spurs jingled. He took one swift glance, as if to assure himself that his daughter had spoken truth, then he strode in, long arm extended.

"Kev, you dod-blasted steelhead ketcher, I'm glad to see you," he greeted Keven heartily, and he wrung his hand until it was numb.

"Hello, Aard. I reckon I—I'm glad if you are."

"Wal, I'm 'most as glad as Beryl. What ails you, Kev?"

"Walked too far and slept on the cold wet ground. I'm not sick. Just sunk, Aard."

"That's how they got you slated in Gold Beach. Sunk! I'm right glad, Kev, to see it's exaggerated."

"What?" asked Kev huskily.

"Your drownin'."

"My—what!"

"You're reported drowned, Kev, along with Garry, Mulligan, an' a couple of fishermen whose names I don't remember. They found your skiff yesterday. It had washed up on the beach. Nothin' would do but I had to identify it. So the old river didn't get you after all?"

"Aard, it seems not. My mind's a little hazy on what did happen."

"My daughter's not hazy about it, that's sure," laughed Aard. "Because it fetched you to Solitude."

"Dad, tell him—tell us all you heard," implored Beryl.

"Nothin' much, though I am surprised at Garry Lord lettin' the Rogue ketch him. A ten-foot rise of water went rollin' down the river. I remember the same kind of flood years ago. It ketched some of the market fishermen at the mouth, when the tide was goin' out. That made it bad. Mulligan sure was drowned. They found his boat out at sea, an' it had his coat an' hat, also some salmon. Two other fishermen were swept out with their nets. What's your story, Kev?"

"Mine? I—I have—no story," faltered Keven.

"But you sure was in that flood!" expostulated Aard mildly. "Was Garry with you in the skiff?"

"Yes, poor faithful Garry!"

"Wal, then, enough said. I know how you feel. I'm doggone sorry. Garry was a man. Kev, you're goin' to stay with us now? Solitude's about the best place on earth for you to land."

"Perhaps it is. Beryl says I'm to stay. I—I have no home. But I won't be a burden. I want to work."

"Sure, after you get well," replied Aard kindly, as he rose. "Beryl has her way, as you'll find out. You can help

me with my traps this winter. An', wal, somethin' might turn up."

"Come, Dad, I'll help you unpack," said Beryl. "If you didn't fetch all the things I wanted there'll be war." At the door she turned to Keven. Then he saw her eyes were full of tears. "Kev, you rest and sleep. Don't feel so—so badly about Garry. Forget it—all. Solitude will make up to you—for everything you've lost."

They went out, and Kev lay still, his hands nerveless upon the blanket. Spent by emotion, he gradually relaxed.



LATE IN THE AFTERNOON Keven awoke for the second time that day. He had no idea when he had dropped off to sleep. He got up laboriously and, pulling on his trousers and shoes, he went out.

Solitude seemed to leap at him. The great V-shaped cleft, where the river turned into the long stretch, was veiled in deep dark blue, above which stood the sunset-flushed peaks. The Rogue flowed pink and white. And below him the sun touched the rapids at the sharp bend, turning the turbulent waters to topaz.

That evanescent moment had waited for him. A change came as the sun sank, and the river ran a glancing red. He saw wild ducks winging rapid flight round the curve, black against the fading light of the sky. From the ravine at

his left pealed up the wild plaintive notes of a water ouzel.

Keven directed his heavy steps down over the mossy rocks to the brook. Here under the arch of firs and pines it was dark, cool, moist, melodious. The water was so clear that pebbles and sand appeared to be uncovered. He sat down to form a cup of his hands, and scooping them up full, he drank.

"To hell with whisky," he muttered.

When he climbed up out of that singing ravine he left something distorted behind. It seemed, too, that when he gained the bench, to view the towering peaks once more, fading from rose to gray, and Aard's cabin where on the porch Beryl stood with the hounds—it seemed that the problem which fronted him was unsolvable and inscrutable. It staggered him. He must try to live objectively and to do what little he might be able to do for these good mountain folk.

"Kev, you are a bad boy," Beryl said reprovingly as he approached. "Come up and sit down. Kev, Dad told me you looked as if you hadn't had enough to eat."

"Reckon he guessed right the very first time. We started out pretty well. We had supplies and we bought some vegetables. Garry was a good cook. But when we got poor—well, we went to loose ends. Many a day with only one meal!"

"No wonder. Listen. We have peaches, apples, blackberries," she returned, with a half-teasing smile. "Cocks of milk in the springhouse. Thick cream! We have chickens, turkeys, pigs. We bake our own bread. We churn our butter. We put up jars and jars of preserves. It's getting almost time now to make peach butter. We have steelhead,

whenever I catch them. That means every time I go fishing. Then the frost has already come up on the high slopes. Wild grapes! And venison. And sometimes bear meat or wild pig, when Dad shoots one. And we have—"

"Beryl, I am overcome," he interrupted, laughing. "I'll eat myself to death. But I must question one of the many items. You said steelhead whenever you went fishing, didn't you?"

"I certainly did."

"I don't think I could ever forgive any fisherman who never failed."

"Kev, I tie my own flies and I know where to drop them on the river."

She nodded her dark head sagely. Then Aard came out on the porch, in bare head and shirt sleeves.

"Wal, son," he said, "Beryl can make good her brag. She's the darnedest best or luckiest fisherman on this river."

"Dad, it's not luck. Don't I know the birds and the wild animals just as well? If I told you where all the mink and otter and raccoon lived we'd soon have none."

"Aard, do you trap a lot?" asked Keven.

"Wal, I try a lot. This spring I took five hundred-odd pelts to Portland. Mostly mink. Otter gettin' scarce. But still there are some left."

"Five hundred!" ejaculated Keven. "Trapping sure is good around Solitude."

"Pretty fair," returned Aard complacently. "It's out of the way an' I have it all to myself. Hope you will pitch in with me. I can guarantee better wages than market fishin'."

"Thanks, Aard. I'll pitch in, you bet," returned Keven enthusiastically. These people struck him just right. With that promise he burned his bridges behind him.

"Kev, I hate trapping," spoke up Beryl. "I've come across traps of Dad's sprung, with a foot or leg of some poor wild creature that had chewed itself free."

"Wal, we have to live, Beryl," said Aard dryly. "An' we have to wear warm skins and furs. I notice you're not so all-fired pitiful about cracking a steelhead over the nose."

"But, Dad, that's merciful!" she expostulated, flushing. "Besides, a fish has no feeling. There's no comparison."

Keven decided this girl had a mind of her own and a temper to match it. He hastened to change the subject to that of fruitgrowing.

"Sure, that'll beat trappin' someday," Aard agreed. "You see I've ten acres in apples already. Oregon apples sell high. There's a fine plot up on the mountain. Good water. You might homestead that land, Kev. Then we'll develop it."

"Can you still homestead national forest land?"

"They say you can't, but the 'breeds do it, right along. I homesteaded this place twenty years ago, before the Cascades were included in a government reserve. They've tried to scare me off. They can't. I've never received a patent for this land, but I own it an' I can prove that. Also, you can locate a minin' claim for about twenty acres, an' so long as you do your assessment work you can't be put off. You can get hold of a piece of land that way."

"By Jove, I'll do it," declared Keven.

"Say, Keven Bell, that wonderful bench just above the shelving ledges where the steelhead lie—that's mine," declared Beryl.

So they talked on, while Keven's eyes roved everywhere. He discovered that

the Aards appeared remarkably comfortable for folk isolated in the mountains, fifty miles from railroad and motor road. The house, though made of logs, was really not a cabin. He could see into the living-room, which was large, light, colorful, plainly but comfortably furnished, and most home-like. The big open fireplace took Keven's eye.

Then there were many more evidences of considerable prosperity. The gardens were trim and neat, well cared for and enclosed in high picket fences. There were a barn and outsheds, chicken coops and pigpens, and two thriving orchards, which ran up a gradual slope to the timber. Aard's horses grazed along the trail, where probably the cows did likewise.

Keven tried to recall what this property had looked like four years ago. And he was sure Aard's prosperity had come since he had last visited Solitude. He conceived an idea that the trapper had other means.

"Aard, I haven't anything to wear except these fishy rags on my back," Keven remarked presently.

"Wal, hop a hoss an' ride down to Illahe. There's a store where you can buy plain stuff."

"I haven't a red cent," confessed Keven, in shame, yet earnest to acquaint them with his actual condition.

"Wal, that's nothin'," replied Aard practically. "Beryl can let you have what you want. She's banker, treasurer, bookkeeper, an' general all-around boss of this camp."

"Kev, I'll ride down to Illahe with you tomorrow," said Beryl. Then her face fell. "But I forgot—you're really not able."

"I might ride a very gentle, easy-gaited horse, if you have one."

"Put Kev on the bay mare, Beryl," suggested Aard.

"She's gentle, but sometimes she takes a notion to buck," returned Beryl dubiously. "We'll try Sam. He's only a mule, but—"

Then the conversation was interrupted by a call to supper. They went in, and on the way Beryl gave Keven's arm a little happy squeeze. She radiated something that convinced Keven she was overflowing with an unspeakable, all-satisfying happiness.

Keven sat down to a bountiful meal that despite his hunger proved tasteless and unsatisfying, because of the craving of his stomach for alcohol. It was an unpleasant and disgusting realization. But he did not despair. That craving must and would begin to grow less and less until it left him entirely. He meant to starve it to death.

Dusk had fallen when they went out upon the porch, and the valley was full of purple shadows. Bats were wheeling over the cabins. There was an intense, all-pervading silence, which seemed unbroken until Keven caught the low murmur of the river. The miner who had named Solitude must have taken this beautiful hour of the evening to express the utter significance of the place.

"Do you smoke, Kev?" asked Aard, lighting his pipe.

"I used to. Cigarettes."

"Dad," spoke up Beryl, "most of the women who stopped at Aunt Lucy's in Roseburg smoked cigarettes. They inhaled the smoke and blew it out through their noses. How could you smell the pines, the firs, the myrtle, the lilac, if you cluttered up your nose with smoke? Kev, could you like a girl who smoked?"

"Well, if she had an overwhelming

number of fine qualities to offset that one bad habit—"Keven began.

"That Brandeth girl drank," said Beryl.

"Wal, liquor is bad enough fer a man," interposed Aard.

"Beryl," queried Keven curiously, "would you like to drive a spiffy little roadster?"

"Me drive a car? Good gracious, no! I'd rather chop wood."

That made Aard chuckle. "I tell you, Kev, she's no mean hand with an ax. Grew up with one."

"It's a rather unusual thing for a girl, I'd say. Beryl, how'd you ever come to learn it?"

"We were poor when I was a kid," replied Beryl. "Dad was always away in the woods. Mother was not well. So I had to chop wood."

"Where'd you go to school?"

"I didn't go," laughed Beryl. "My school was the woods."

"Beryl, you had some schoolin' those days," corrected Aard. "Your mother was well educated."

"But it was the four years at Roseburg," explained Beryl. "I just ate up books alive. I didn't get on well with the boys and girls. I was so homesick for Solitude that I nearly went crazy. So I studied."

"You must have. I don't think there's anything I could teach you, unless of course how to fly-fish for steelhead," said Keven teasingly.

"Why, Kev Bell, I could fish rings around you," she replied vehemently. "It's to know where steelhead lie. That's the secret. You never knew. You'd wade in like a cow drinking and scare all the trout out of their wits. That's why I never would fish downstream behind you."

"Wouldn't you?" he replied feebly.

"No, I wouldn't. You used to make me—till I just quit. For three whole days I tagged after you, carrying your trout, and trying to raise one for myself. Then I rebelled and the fourth day we quarreled."

"What day was it you showed me where the big trout lay, and I hooked him, and he dragged me a mile down the river?"

"That was that fourth day," she replied demurely. Keven desisted from further teasing. But it had come back to him—the memory of the delicious pleasure he had derived in that way. She spoke lingeringly of days as if they embodied whole endless, unforgettable summer months.

"Aard, I can't earn my keep by fishing," said Keven. "Lord knows I'd love to fish the rest of my life away, with Beryl, along the river. But I must work. Have you work I can do or learn to do?"

"Wal, now, let me see," replied Aard, puffing his pipe. "You mustn't pitch in too hard. I take it you're not a well man. Let's give nature a chance. Kev, if you don't mind my bein' personal, haven't you drunk pretty hard?"

"Too much," admitted Keven. "I got in the habit not through love of liquor—for I really hate it—but to dull pain. Never again, Aard. I am through with that forever."

"Good, I was just goin' to say you wouldn't be welcome here at Solitude if you drank. How about it, Beryl?"

"Oh, Dad, don't—don't be hard upon Kev," she replied. "I'd not say he wouldn't be welcome under any circumstances. But we don't need to speak of it. Kev has had a horrible ordeal. He is ill yet. He will get well here with us. Solitude needs no false stimulation."

"Wal, I reckon Kev has got it in him,

an' if you can't fetch it out, your Indian blood isn't red any more."

"Indian blood!" ejaculated Keven. "Has Beryl really Indian in her?"

"I'd say sometimes she's all Indian," rejoined the father. "But for real Indian blood, yes. Beryl's mother's mother was a half-breed. She had a child by an Englishman, a gold-huntin' wanderer. So Beryl's about one-eighth red-skin, an' sure comes honestly by her love of the wild.

"Now, let's see. The garden an' the orchards—a man's job all by themselves. There's fence to repair an' fence to build. These pesky deer can jump over the moon. One big buck comes down 'most every mornin'. He plays hell with my garden. I'd have shot him long ago but for Beryl. *She* says he knows her. Wal, I reckon you'd better knock him over one of these fine mornin's an' we'll have some deer meat. We've got to kill pigs this fall. We've got a lot of shakes to split. There's the winter firewood. An' with you an' Beryl sittin' up at nights before the burnin' logs—wal, it'll take ten cords or more. An' from now on to November we've got to ketch steelhead to smoke for winter use. All of which is outside the big job. An' that's trappin' fur."

"By cracky, I don't have to worry about plenty of work, but whether or not I can make good," exclaimed Kev.

"Take things easy, Kev. We're in no hurry here at Solitude," said Aard.

"Dad, it's good you added that. Kev might get a wrong idea. You should also have told him how from November till spring we are shut in."

"Is the winter hard here?" asked Keven.

"Not down in the valley. The snow melts off the south slopes. But up on top it's sure winter for a few months."

"Kev, sometime soon I want you to help me order books for winter reading," said Beryl. "We mustn't tie trout flies *all* the time. Or sit before the blazing logs, holding hands, as Dad hinted."

"I didn't hint no such thing," vowed Aard stoutly.

What would Aard say if someone proved to him that Keven Bell had made love to his young daughter, had won her, and then had gone away to espouse another girl and to forget Solitude? Keven managed a laugh that was not wholly sincere.

"Now, if you're going to poke fun at me I'd better say good night. But, Aard, you and Beryl make me feel so deeply that I can't even try to thank you. God knows I do. I was at the jumping-off place. I hope I can come somewhere near your expectations."

Presently Keven leaned out of the window of his cabin to take a last look at the splendid black slopes, so still and wild, at the winding river, half in shadow and the other half shimmering under the stars. The river song seemed sadder. From the depths of the ravine came the soft flow of running water.

"I ought to want to fall in love with her," he mused broodingly. "My God, I know I shall—if there's man enough left in me."

CHAPTER TWELVE

Rogue River Queen

SAM isn't a stubborn mule," said Beryl the next morning, when she led Keven out to the barn, where Aard had saddled the mule and a white horse. "But he falls asleep on the trail. And when he does he stops. So just give him a gid."

They mounted and rode out of the clearing into the trail, with Beryl leading. She talked no more. She seldom looked back. She touched the leaves, the pine needles, the mossy trunks, the lichened rocks, the ferns, with slow lingering, loving hand. Her dark head had the poise of a listening deer.

When they emerged where the trail ran along the open shore, Keven saw Solitude in all its sublimity. The dark green slopes, the darker green river, sliding, whirling, foaming around the shaded bend, the grand bronze and fern-festooned cliffs, the black rocks that were sections of a splintered mountain—these seemed alive under the purple mantle of the lifting mist, gleaming in that subdued and supernatural light like the strange glow of low clouds before a storm.

Some few miles down the trail Keven made a twofold discovery: first that he was perceptibly tiring, and secondly that it would be wise not to risk going on to any place where drink was procurable. This was confessing a grave possibility. He did not wholly trust himself. If he fell on this occasion he would never be quite the same again.

Coming to an open glade in the forest, he called to Beryl and then slipped out of his saddle, to sit down upon the ground. She cried out and, leaping from her horse, she flew back to kneel beside him.

"Kev! Kev!" she cried, putting her arms about him.

"Beryl, I'd better not try to go farther," he said, smiling.

"Oh, is there anything the matter? A stitch in your side, maybe? Or have the stirrups twisted your feet under too far? They're heavy, and I was afraid they'd tire you."

"Yes, I guess I've the stitch, all right, and the paralyzed feet, also a knee or two, and one hip. But that's not all," he said jokingly.

She studied him with most earnest gaze. "Kev, you wouldn't deceive me?"

"How—how do you mean?" he queried.

"You haven't any organic trouble? Heart disease—or anything like?"

"No, I'm not as bad off as that," replied Keven.

Suddenly she drew his face close against her breast and held it there tight. He felt the swell of her bosom, the throb of her heart.

"You rest, then we'll go back," she said.

"Is it all right for you to go on alone?"

"Yes. I often ride to Illahe."

"Well, then, I'll stay here and rest. You go. I'll be okay when you get back. Will you buy me the things I need? Here is my list."

She scanned it carefully. "Kev, there are no shoes here. Have you any but those awful things your feet are falling out of?" she asked.

"Beryl, I told you I had only what I wore on my back," he replied.

"You'll need hunting boots, as well as moccasins. What size?"

"Number eights."

"And size of hat?"

"Seven."

"You'll need gloves, too. And, well, I'll buy what I think you need."

"Thanks. You're very kind," replied Keven meekly. "Only don't make it so much I can't pay back."

"Are you sure you'll be all right?" she concluded dubiously, as she turned to mount her horse. "Sam will not stray far. I won't be long."

Then she went clattering down the

trail to disappear in the green forest. Keven found a comfortable posture, with his head on a mossy mound. He then applied himself grimly to enduring his ordeal. It was there, the gnawing desire for liquor, but he could stand it. He found that he could. As moments dragged on into an hour he became conscious that it grew no worse. He got used to enduring it, and then it strangely seemed to diminish. Presently he fell asleep.

Something startled him back to consciousness. The lacy foliage of a fir tree filled his gaze.

"Kev! Kev! Wake up!" called Beryl gaily. "Oh, I'm so glad. You were sound asleep. Behold me—packer for one Keven Bell!"

Keven stared at her, where she appeared to rise head and shoulders out of innumerable bundles. "What'd you do, buy out that store?" he queried, aghast.

"'Most did. Come, Sam's right there. Get on him. We've got to walk the horse home."

"I think I'll walk a little myself, and lead Sam."

A mile or so was about all Keven cared to accomplish before mounting again. Beryl forged ahead. The mule, however, when he was no longer led, soon caught up with the horse. Early afternoon found them turning the bend into Solitude.

Beryl rode her horse up to Keven's cabin and, dismounting, she began to untie the bundles and deposit them upon the porch. Keven got off to help her, not unaware of her giggles.

"There, Kev. You carry the things in and unwrap them. I don't want to be around," she said, with a kind of repressed glee, and led the horse and mule toward the barn.

It took half a dozen trips for Kev to carry all the bundles inside. "I'll be jiggered!" he muttered. But it was impossible not to feel a curious pleasure. Slowly he began to open the parcels, to lay each article on the bed, and after that was covered, the rest on the floor. What an assortment! Those particular things he had listed were all there. Nor had she neglected the things most useful and dear to the man of the open: a hand ax and a flashlight, a buckskin shirt embroidered in beads, a cap and a sombrero, and last a tin box full of native-tied steelhead flies. Then more necessary, perhaps, certainly more commonly practical, a wash basin and pitcher, towels and soap, clothesbrush and a small mirror.

All this array delighted him. "Darn it, she's a thoroughbred and a sport. Who ever thought of me, like this, except my mother?"

He thought he had loved Rosamond Brandeth. But he had been only a boy just smitten with a pretty face. He realized that he had never loved her—that now he despised her. As a woman she was a candle to the sun, compared to Beryl Aard.

Keven then applied himself to the task of practical application. He shaved, he donned clean new clothes. One of the several flannel shirts was a gorgeous one, barred in black-and-white check, with dots of red, and this one he chose. The boots fitted fairly well, and would do when his blistered feet got well. He buckled on the gun belt. Thus arrayed, he went out to find Aard at work in the orchard. Keven joined him, eager to work, if not strenuously capable.

When hours later Beryl called them to supper it was none too soon for Keven. He again felt ready to drop.

When he stepped into the Aards' living-room, the sun, shining its last that day from the river gap, flooded through the window. Keven encountered Beryl, quite unprepared to see her in a white dress, which, simple and modest as it was, completely changed her. Keven stared in undisguised admiration.

Beryl clapped her hands at sight of him.

"Dad, look at him. Kev Bell, you handsome backwoods riverman!"

"You—you're not so bad yourself," replied Keven confusedly.

"This dress! You should see me in my good one," she exclaimed. "But that must wait till Dad takes us to Portland. Dad, when will that be?"

"Wal, if we have a good winter trap-pin', why, I'd say next spring," replied Aard.

"If it depends on *that*, I don't care to go," retorted Beryl.

"All right, you stay home an' keep house. Kev an' I will have more fun, mebbe."

She shot him and Keven a blazing-eyed glance.

"Wal, son, did you buy out the store at Illahe?" went on Aard, as he seated himself at the table.

"No, I didn't. Beryl did. I couldn't ride all the way. She went on and did the purchasing. Heaven help her when she gets a husband—unless he's rich."

"Heaven help her, indeed, if she *ever* gets him," Beryl rejoined.

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roared Aard.

Keven stared down at his steaming plate. He felt at a loss just how to take that sally of hers. Silently then he waived reply and applied himself to the supper. After a time, however, he looked up at Beryl, to find her eyes downcast.

Emboldened by this, Keven glanced at her then, and from time to time after-

ward, but he could not catch her eye. There was a heightened color in her cheeks, almost a red spot. Twice when she rose to go into the kitchen his gaze followed her. In the white dress she looked slight, compared to the stalwart girl she appeared in rougher garb.

Later in the bright lamplight he had better opportunity to observe her unobtrusively. She was a little over the medium height for women, compactly, beautifully built. She had a firm strong hand, brown, well shaped, and a rounded superb arm, upon which the muscles played. She stood erect as an Indian, lithe, almost pantherish in movement, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, giving singular impression of tremendous vitality. Once before he had compared her with the erotic Rosamond Brandeth; and when he did it again all the finality of that decision swung immeasurably to Beryl's benefit.



NEXT MORNING, bright and early, Keven went to work. Standing and bending were much harder for him than sitting in a boat rowing. Moreover he missed the stimulus of liquor. On the other hand there was a remarkable inspiration in the mere surroundings of Solitude.

Beryl did not let him forget her. From time to time that first day she appeared much interested in how he was progressing, and visited him while he worked under Aard's direction. Invariably, however, she would wander away into the shade of the firs, or to the bank of the ravine, or down toward the calling river. While she did stay near him, attentive to his task, her humor seemed paramount.

"Kev, you might become a great fisherman—under expert advice, if you would heed it—but you'll never make a farm hand," was a final example of her remarks.

"My dear Miss Aard," replied Keven. "I am a great fisherman. As for the rest, beggars can't be choosers. At that, I like this kind of work better than rowing all day and half the night, wet and cold, covered with fish slime."

"You're so slow and awkward, Kev," she objected. "You bend as if you were afraid of breaking a wire in your back."

"I am. That's my spine. You forget my body stopped the recoil of a cannon. I will never again be a man such as you could admire."

Quick tears dimmed the fun in her eyes, and she turned away. He had hurt her. And this would ever be so, if she continuously kept making remarks, however innocent, that threw his oversensitive mind on his frailty.

"Wal, son, don't mind Beryl," spoke up Aard, who had heard the byplay. "She's full of the Old Nick. As for your condition, I reckon you exaggerate it. You're a better man than you think. Just now you're run down. You're starved. But even so you work pretty good. Forget about everythin'. When you tire out go lay down. Soon we'll have these little jobs done. Then you can fish an' hunt, an' later take to the trappin' with me. By that time you won't know yourself."

Aard radiated quiet strength and assurance, like the great dark mountains under which he had lived so long. Keven could not help being influenced for the better. Aard was a man to look up to.

Keven stuck on the job till just before sunset, when he went to his cabin to clean up and rest. The call to supper

interrupted a dreamy contemplation of the river.

"I called you three times," announced Beryl, when he presented himself at the other cabin.

"You did! I'm sorry. I get sort of absent-minded sometimes."

"You go into a trance. Anyone might think you were in love with one of those Grant's Pass girls. Rosamond Brandeth, for instance."

"Anyone might think anything if she hasn't control over her mind," retorted Keven, hiding the start he had sustained. Had Beryl heard gossip? "It happens, however, that I am not suffering from such affliction."

After the meal he said, "Beryl, I've just strength enough left to drag myself to bed. Please excuse me."

Considering the variety of her moods, Keven rather expected her to pout or to tell him tartly to go, if he would rather sleep than have her society for an hour before the fire. But she said nothing and walked with him through the dusk to his cabin.

"I put a bag of fir cones and pine needles in your cabin," she said. "They're nice to start a quick little fire. They smell so sweet when burning."

"Thanks, Beryl, that was thoughtful of you."

She touched his arm and looked up at him, her face in shadow.

"It makes me happy to realize you're actually here," she said. "To see you can work! To know you can rest! Dad says you are already improving. I think so, too, and that is well. Good night."

She left him then, and Keven went into his cabin, to start his little fire, before which he sat a few moments, thoughtful and sad.

TWO WEEKS sped by, bringing the end of summer and the beginning of the colorful days of autumn. The Rogue Valley was famous for its blazing beauty of foliage, but Solitude was magnificent beyond comparison with any other place along the river. It flaunted its frosted maples and oaks, the madroña, the myrtle, and the mazanita, the ferns and rock vines.

Keven's application to his tasks was too hard and exhausting to be enjoyable. But more than duty to the Aards drove him; he realized he was toiling and sweating the pangs of alcohol from his body. At first it was something he felt he owed Beryl for her faith, and then something deep and still unconquered in himself.

The dawn came when he awoke without any particular craving. His appetite had imperceptibly come back; he was gaining weight slowly but surely.

"Wal," remarked Aard, at supper, "we sure eat up those jobs. Firewood an' shacks must wait for snow. We have to snake the wood from on top. Reckon it's up to you an' Beryl to ketch about a ton of steelhead for smokin'. An' right now some venison would go fine."

"Kev, have you as much as looked at the river lately?" inquired Beryl.

"I'm always looking at it."

"Seen anything?"

"Nothing unusual," replied Keven.

"It's full of steelhead. There's a run on."

"No! Have you been fishing?" asked Keven eagerly.

"Not yet. I'd hate to make you feel badly," Beryl admitted.

"That wouldn't make me feel badly," went on Keven, puzzled.

"I always make Dad very tired, and I'm sure I'd make you sick."

"Howso?"

"I'd catch a lot of steelhead. Then, when you saw them you'd rush down to the river. And when you couldn't catch any you'd be wretched."

"Is that so?" returned Keven spirit-edly. "Beryl Aard, I can raise and catch steelhead in the Rogue as well as anyone."

"Most likely, up the river. But this fishing down here is different. You never did catch any—except a couple of little ones. Five pounds or so. And I don't keep that size. Here at Solitude you must know the river. Where they lie—what they take. And if I remember rightly you just wouldn't listen to me."

"Beryl, you don't honestly mean you could beat me fishing?" he queried frankly.

Her merry laughter pealed out. Aard chuckled over his pipe.

"Beat you! Why, Kev, I could do it with my left hand and never get my feet wet."

"Why, child, you *are* crazy!"

Beryl smiled at him and then at her amused father. "Dad, the war you predicted is on. Will you be stakeholder and judge?"

"You really have the nerve to bet?" asked Keven.

"Yes, I'll bet you. What is more, I'll let you set the conditions. One day, or two days, or three. You can choose where you want to fish."

"Say, don't rub it in," retorted Keven. "We'll draw lots. Aard, hold these two pine needles in your hand. One short and one long. Whoever gets the long one has the choice. There. Now draw, Beryl."

She drew the short one, which not one whit diminished her smiling assurance.

"I hate to do this, Aard," said Keven.

"It's like taking candy from the baby. Beryl, I'll go up the river and fish down."

"Splendid. Just where I want you to go," she returned. "Oh, Kev, I feel so sorry for you. If only you'll be a good sport and not get mad!"

"Do you wish to make any conditions?" asked Keven condescendingly.

"Only one. Not a single word about flies and leaders until after the contest. Do you agree?"

"Certainly. Now I'd like to make a condition. That I give you odds."

"No. I'll not consent to that, though if I did, Mister Upriver, it would make your defeat more crushing."

"Very well. Now what will I bet you?"

"Let's make it the same for both—the best tackle we can buy."

"I'll go you! Aard, you have got all this data in your mind?"

"Sure. All you have to do now is set the time to start."

"After breakfast," replied Beryl promptly.

"That's what I expected of a lazy, luxurious girl," agreed Keven. "But I always used to be on the river at day-break."

"What for?" asked Beryl.

"Why, to fish, of course."

"I hope you're not one of those early-birds-catching-the-worm sort of fishermen. Steelhead don't rise till the mist is off the river. Down here in these canyons that's after sunup."

For the first time Keven had a vague notion that this Aard girl might really know something about the science of trout fishing.

"Well, good night, Beryl," he said, rising to go. "I want to look over my tackle and rig up. It's too bad we'll never be friends again."

"Aren't you of a forgiving nature? Good night, Isaac."

"Isaac! Why call me a jawhawker name like that?"

"Don't you know Isaac Walton?"

"Sorry to say I never met the gentleman," returned Keven, from the door.

He repaired to his cabin, and after lighting his lamp and kindling his little fire of cones he got out the tackle Minton had sold him on credit long months before. He spent a pleasant hour of task and anticipation, after which he went to bed.

He got up early next morning, to put on the discarded market-fishing clothes, and to spend another half hour trying to select flies for the day. At length he decided to take them all.

While he was at breakfast with Aard, Beryl came out of her room, carrying a queer-looking limber rod, evidently homemade. Beryl in short skirt, heavy woolen stockings, and hobnailed shoes looked as businesslike as her tackle.

"I've had my breakfast, Kev," she said. "You'll find me when you come down the river. Good luck."

"Same to you," replied Keven. "Don't fall down, don't get wet, and don't lose your tackle."

"Where'd that antediluvian tackle of hers come from?" he asked after she had gone.

"It was made by an old friend of mine who lives on the Umpqua. I gave it to Beryl. That yew wood is too limber for me."

"Yew? Split bamboo is the only wood for rods."

"I reckon the rod don't cut much ice, nohow. It's part your leader and part your fly—then most the way you work 'em. I'll give you another tip, Kev. Use small dark flies with some buff in them. Or gray with tan wings."

"Haven't any such flies," replied Keven.

"Wal, you ought to, if you're buckin' up against that girl. An' another thing, stay out of the water."

"Aard, are you too telling me how to fish the Rogue?" queried Keven. "Well, you want to be around when we get back."

"Don't worry, son, I wouldn't miss that for anythin'."

Soon Keven was on his way up the trail. He walked a mile or more and then made his way down to the river. It appeared a little high, but was clear. The places he had in memory were gone, and he was too eager to begin fishing to look about him.

Almost at the outset he made a remarkable and humiliating discovery. There did not seem to be any co-ordination whatever between his theory of casting, the skill he fondly had believed was unforgettable, and the actual physical accomplishment. His casting was atrocious; in fact, he could not cast at all. He hooked the bushes on his back throw, the trees, and himself. But he persevered and waded on downstream. Presently he raised a nice trout, that leaped on a slack line and escaped. Keven recovered the hook to find that the point had broken.

He persevered, and the harder he tried the worse things became. He could not wade out far, owing to the depth of the water; he could not remain in it long, owing to its icy nature. The most annoying feature of his return to fly-fishing, after four years and more, was the way he snagged the brush behind him. Several flies were lost this way and leaders broken.

At a likely pool, the first where he saw steelhead rising, he slipped off a rock, like an elephant, and spoiled that

place. At another spot he cast his favorite fly, and cast and cast, until he did get a smashing strike. The fish felt heavy. He was about to whoop when it got off. Again Keven found the point of his hook broken.

Then out of dim past associations brightened the one that had to do with a fly-fisherman's jinx—the breaking of hooks on rocks, on the backcast. Keven remembered, after it was too late. Then he essayed to send his backcast high, with the result that he hooked branches over his head. After breaking half a dozen leaders this way, and decorating the trees with gaudy counterfeits of insects, he found himself humiliated by having to climb to recover a fly that was a killer upon the upper Rogue. After hard work he got out on the branch, which promptly broke with him, letting him down ten feet, half in and half out of the water. It was not only his feelings that got hurt.

The day wore on. So did Keven's temper. And then to cap the climax he hooked a little steelhead that darted downstream and could not be held. Keven let it run and ran himself. He had long been unused to running over slippery rocks, and he lost his balance. Trying frantically to regain it, he only made the plunge longer and harder, which ended him heels up and head down, crack against a rock.

He saw stars and had a terrific pain in his jaw. The iron contrivance came loose from where it hinged on the bone, causing such pain as he had not suffered in a long while. After a time it eased and Keven went on fishing.

He kept on downstream, casting here and there, hoping for a rise and knowing he would not get it, until he could travel no farther that way. The water was deep, and a cliff impassable. Keven

retraced his steps and climbed up the wooded bank, and went on down, searching for a place to get back to the river.

He had to climb over logs, driftwood, rocks, and he was forever snagging his line. Human nature could endure no more. He became furious. He swore. He tore through that thicket, hot, sweating, and scratched.

He saw that he had reached the bend at Solitude. The great boulders trooped like huge beasts out into the wide stretch above the rapids.

Suddenly he espied Beryl. Something checked his impulse to halloo. He watched.

"What in the dickens is she doing?" he muttered.

She stood on a low rock, back from the edge of the eddying pool, apparently quite shallow there, and she was moving the limber rod sidewise toward the shore and below her. Then she whipped the rod, back and forward, to send her fly out a little way. It could hardly be called a cast. Keven laughed under his breath. Poor kid!

She bent forward slightly, every muscle and nerve evidently taut, and she drew that tiny fly sidewise, with delicate, almost invisible vibrations of the rod, across the water. The fly resembled some crippled little winged thing struggling to escape. Suddenly Keven saw a boil on the still water, then circles, ever widening. She had raised a trout.

Keven climbed up on a high boulder, the better to see. Beryl repeated that queer performance. Keven saw a broad bar of white and pink rise out of the shady green water. What a steelhead! He rose, he turned, he poked at the fly, and refusing it he turned back

again, sending the telltale circles widening over the eddy.

"Hey, Beryl," Keven yelled, "he won't rise again. Rest him awhile."

He jumped down and ran around and over the jumble of rocks to a point near where Beryl was fishing. She stood blankly astounded, her rod up, and she stared at him.

"Get back. You'll scare my fish," she called peremptorily.

"Scare? He's already scared. He won't rise again—not for a while anyway. Come here and let me give you a fly. Gee, he's a corker. I saw him," babbled Keven in his excitement.

"Will you get back away from the water?" she queried sharply.

"What?"

"Can't you hear?" Beryl stamped her foot. "Get back! Vamoose! Chase yourself! And hurry before you scare my steelhead."

"You poor child," ejaculated Keven pityingly. "So that's how you fish? I was afraid—"

"Get back or I'll throw a rock at you," screamed Beryl. "You're deliberately trying to scare my steelhead—so I can't catch him."

"All right, throw a rock. Throw two rocks," retorted Keven, growing exasperated. "I was only trying to help you."

"Help nothing, you ninny," cried Beryl, and stooping suddenly she picked a round stone from beside the boulder and threw it with remarkable speed and precision right at Keven's feet. He had to jump quickly to escape a crack on the shins.

"Well, you—you—darned little fool!" burst out Keven. He wanted to swear, but as he could not do that he substituted a wholly inadequate epithet. And he stood stock-still in his tracks.

Beryl picked up another rock. "I'll hit you next time," she said.

"Very well, you sweet, gentle, dove-like creature!" exclaimed Keven and he moved back to a point behind her.

Quite suddenly he came up a shallow runway between some stones, in which lay a number of steelhead, showing their rainbowlike sides, curling broad tails, and speckled fins. They had been strung on a forked willow branch. Keven had never been so surprised in all his life along that Rogue River.

"For heaven's sake! Where'd these steelhead come from?" he yelped.

"They're mine," replied Beryl, stepping out on the flat boulder.

"Yours?"

"Yes, mine!"

"Where'd you get them?"

"I put salt on their tails," she rejoined sarcastically.

"Beryl Aard, do you mean to tell me you caught these fish?"

"You bet I did."

"On that flimsy two-bit rig?"

"Yes, you darned big fool. And I'll catch another and the biggest yet—if you go away somewhere."

Keven could not believe his eyes. He counted the fish. Nine there were; three around four pounds, and the others graduated up from six and seven, to one almost eight. Keven gazed and gazed, and then meekly went back and sat down.

Beryl was poised precisely as she had been before becoming aware of his presence. Instead of looking ridiculous now she struck him as keen, vibrant, perfectly balanced, and absolutely master of that flimsy rod and trailing fly. She made it dance on the water.

There came a wave, a smash on the surface—then a sweet, wild, high-pitched cry of elation.

Keven leaped up, beside himself with excitement, and ran back to the point nearest her. He looked in time to see a huge opal-colored steelhead plunge back into the water. Beryl's rod bent like a buggy whip. The reel screamed and the line hissed. Then out in the middle of the great pool the steelhead began to skyrocket in extraordinary manner.

"Hold your rod up," Keven bawled. "Let him run . . . Don't give him the butt. You'll break his off . . . Oh, drop your tip! . . . Wind! Reel in, fast—faster . . . Oh, hell, can't you hear me? You'll lose him! . . . Wind in! Let him run! Elevate your rod! . . . Drop it quick!"

"*You shut up! You'll make me lose him!*" cried Beryl furiously.

Keven never heard her, or at least did not heed. No mere girl could handle a monster steelhead like that on a flimsy little willow wand. He must rush to her assistance. Just as he reached the rock his feet slipped from under him. He reeled and swayed to recover balance, with the result that at last he plunged down to collide with Beryl and knock her off the rock.

When he got to his knees, dizzy with pain, Beryl was climbing back on the rock, drenched to the skin, water pouring from her in little streams.

Tears, too, were streaming from her eyes. Her hands were outstretched, holding the rod, which was broken in the middle. The line trailed limply on the water behind her.

"You broke it! My beautiful little rod!" she wailed.

"I didn't," protested Keven, laboriously getting to his feet.

"Yes, you did! You bumped me—off the rock."

"That rod was—no good anyhow," panted Keven.

"No good!" she cried. "It was the best rod in the world. You made me break it—you big lummox!"

"You don't know how to handle a fish," avowed Keven heatedly. There was no use to try to be reasonable with this girl.

"Don't I? That's what you think. I'd have landed him—if you hadn't come butting in here. But I could bear that, only for my precious yew-wood rod. You broke it—and my heart, too."

"I only wanted to help you."

"Help? Ha! Ha! A lot of help you'd have been, with your crazy upriver methods. You kept yelling, '*Wind in! Let him run! Elivate your rod! Drop it quick!*' What kind of talk is that? Idiotic, I call it."

"There's a style of fishing you don't understand, Miss Aard," retorted Keven loftily.

"Thank heaven!" she retorted fervently.

"There's a difference between a real pothunting fisherman and a classy fly-fisherman."

"Classy? You're a conceited jackass of a fisherman—to make me break my rod, lose my fish, and then blab, blab, blab class to me. That's funny. Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"Don't you laugh at me, Beryl Aard," he shouted.

"I'll swear at you next—you *dude* fisherman," she raged.

"You, you country-jake fisherman!" stammered Keven hoarsely.

Her eyes blazed like glowing coals. Then, swinging a vigorous arm, she gave Keven a terrific slap.

Not only the violence of it staggered him, but the blow fell on the side of his face which had been hurt before

that day. The agony struck him almost blind. As he sank to his knees his shaking hands fumbled at his mouth. The bent iron bar, which served as a substitute for the missing section of jaw-bone, had been knocked loose, to protrude from his lips. He stuck it back and fought to keep from fainting.

Beryl plumped to her knees before him. "Kev! What was that?"

"My—iron—jaw," he whispered huskily.

"Oh, my God! I didn't know."

She clasped him with strong hands, which lifted his face, suddenly to grow gentle as they felt his cheek.

"I hurt you terribly," she said in self-accusation.

Keven tried to joke. "You hit like the breechblock of that bursting gun."

"Oh, why—*why* didn't you tell me?" she moaned. "I'd never have struck you then. No matter how—how brutal you were!"

"I have a little pride left. God knows, I must have seemed crippled wretch enough."

"Hush! Do not talk like that." In a passion of repentance she kissed the bruised and swollen jaw, whispering between her kisses "Forgive me, Kev, I didn't know . . . You made me see red . . . I'd die for you! . . . Darling! Forgive me . . . I love you so."

His eyes closed. He crushed her wet head to him; he bent it back, blindly to seek her lips. "There's—nothing—to—forgive," he mumbled. "Beryl—darling."

"Kev—say that again," she at last whispered imploringly.

"Beryl—darling. I—I didn't know I loved you."

"I was afraid you didn't—any more. Oh, Kev!"

Just then a stentorian voice roared down from the trail: "*Hey, thar!*"

Beryl lifted startled eyes. "Oh, Lord! There's Dad!"

Keven espied the tall figure of Aard framed in gold-green foliage.

"Is that how you kids bet on fishin'?" he yelled.

"Oh, Dad—I won!" screamed Beryl, waving her broken rod.

"Won what?" Aard shouted.

Beryl's gay, sweet wild laughter rang out. "*Everything!*"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Climb

THE October days had come, gray at dawn, etching the leaves with hoarfrost, lifting the clouds of mist, opening to the blue and gold above, windless and still and solemn, wearing through the long smoky hot afternoons to the gorgeous effulgence in the sky, and on to dusk, steeped in the melancholy of solitude.

Keven and Beryl climbed the trail back of the cabins, she leading the way, silent and pensive, he following, rifle in hand, with vigor in his step and glowing tan in cheeks no longer hollow.

The trail took the course of the brook. They reached the waterfall, where the brook leaped out of a gray notch to a wide flat ledge, over which it poured in a white sheet, lacy and snowy at the curve, to thin out into a downward-darkening smoke as it disappeared in the glen.

Above the fall stood firs, great brown-barked trees, branchless far up, rising to lofty height, to spread a minigling canopy overhead. A hawk sailed

in zigzag flight among the treetops, vanishing like a fading gleam. The trail climbed to a level bench where the firs thickened and the ferns began to encroach upon the brown-carpeted earth. It swung over to the brow of the ravine, deepening here to a wide timber-choked canyon, up from which floated the music of stone-retarded running water. Far under the grand, dark evergreens flamed the maples, gold-leaved and scarlet and yellow-green.

Beryl paused to gaze, and Keven, with eyes roving everywhere, halted to catch his breath. The forest seemed a vast cathedral, a colorful green-roofed hall of the wilderness. The ravine sent up its cool fragrance to mingle with the pungent piny odor of the firs.

A crash in the brush startled Keven. He wheeled. Beryl was pointing at a gray-blue bounding object that vanished as if by magic. The crack of hoof on dry branch was the last they heard.

"Buck," said Beryl. "I'm glad you didn't shoot."

"Gosh, I forgot I had the rifle," he whispered.

They climbed on, and the forest grew denser, wilder, blacker, and the underbrush closed above their heads. A gloomy silence prevailed in this primeval forest, where a snapped twig caused a start, and a voice would have been sacrilege. On they walked, and wound through the woods, up and up to a changing region. Pines began to appear, and gnarled oaks, and here and there the wondrous smooth-barked red-and-copper madroña.

Higher still they entered the zone of the oaks, an open forest, patched with sunlit glades of golden grass, upon which the bronze leaves were rustling down. The ground was dry as tinder and reflected the strong heat of the

sun. Manzanita with its yellow berries and myrtle with its faded flowers clustered in favored nooks.

Keven and Beryl wandered on with lingering, ever-slowing steps, at last to halt upon an open brow of ground, where a monarch oak, noble and old, bleached at the top, invited rest. They sat down, backs to the wide trunk. Far below shone the river, winding along the bottom of the valley. Its roar soared up, voice of the wilderness, low and continuous.

There was life in this oak forest. Frost had kissed the acorns. Wild pigeons fluttered among the leaves; robins, halting to rest on their way southward, gave forth plaintive notes, as melancholy as the autumn. Squirrels revealed their cautious movements to keen eyes; jays squalled and crows cawed. And far down through the aisles between the oaks listening deer, sleek and gray, passed with graceful step.

Long Keven reclined there against the tree trunk, feeling Beryl beside him, watching and listening.

The forest spoke, the river called, the clouds sailed across the blue above. The smell of the hot dry earth, the sweet myrtle, the faint pungency of the piny mountain slope below and intangible drifting odors filtered into Keven's blood.

He had the sensation of sinking through space and the immeasurable past back to the primal day when these things had been inculcated into the flesh and bone that had been father to him. He wavered there on the verge, never quite attaining the savage state that his being yearned for. Never could he utterly win that bliss for more than a fleeting instant.

"Beryl, what are you thinking of?" he asked at last.

"I wasn't thinking," she said dreamily.

"What were you doing?"

"Nothing."

"Are you happy?" he went on.

"Oh—so happy," she replied softly.

"You like this? To climb high up the mountain, to look far down, to be under the trees?"

"Love it better than anything except the river—and you."

"You have an oak leaf in one hand," continued Keven, "and pine needles in the other. You have been smelling them. I watched you on the way up. I saw you touch the firs with caressing hand. You choose to sit in the sun instead of the shade. You stuck a long golden leaf in your hair, as an Indian might a feather. A hundred things like these you've done. Were you conscious of them?"

"No, Kev, I wasn't," she replied. "I'm surprised at you. I'll have to be careful—if you're so observant."

"Dear, I want you to help me to find out something."

"About me, Kev?"

"Yes, and through that, about myself."

"I'm an open book for you, Kev."

"You are not. You are a marvelous mystery. I don't want you any different. Beryl, only a little while ago—well, you know what I was. Then came freedom from that craving for liquor. Then came love! I *feel* health, strength coming back. I sleep, I eat. I can see better out of this half-blind eye. There, I'll hold my hand over my good eye—Beryl, I can see you—and not so dimly. So you and the river and this solitude have done something to my spirit, and through that to my mistreated body. I can't explain it. I only feel. And I am tortured because it may be only a dream, a delusion."

"Ah no, Kev. It comes from my beloved Solitude."

"But what comes?" he entreated in perplexity.

"I—I don't know exactly," she replied thoughtfully. "But I know how I feel when I'm away. I long for the river and the woods. Out there in what they call civilization I see and I think. Here I see, but don't think, I guess that's it. Roseburg and Portland, one a town and the other a city, I enjoy for a while. I liked my work at Roseburg, and especially school. But I saw the haste, the waste, the madness of people. For money! For excitement! For speed! Then I would long for the river, and the firs, for my Solitude. And when I got back something stole over me again. All that—that which troubled me faded away. I forgot."

"In a word, Beryl, peace comes to one here. And after that, this other thing—this illusive spell, which you and I were under till I broke it."

"Kev, you are a very bright boy! But let's go back to our spell. Let's climb higher, where we can see. This is nothing. Let's go up, Kev, up to a place I know, and forget."

"Yes, darling, I'll be happy to, but just a word more. Please."

"Well, go on, you dream-killer!"

"Doesn't this wonderful spell you speak of come from physical things? What thrills you the most?"

"Smells. The smell of the pines and the firs. The smell of burning leaves—of campfire smoke. The smell of sweet myrtle. Oh, I love to smell everything here. Even a skunk! Isn't that dreadful? But it's true."

Keven laughed at that, but continued, "Now, Beryl, when you look out there and down, what do you feel?"

"Nothing, till you make me think. I just see."

He was silent awhile. "Come on, enchantress," he said at length, merrily seizing her hand. "Let us climb on up—and back! But beware of making me love you more."



Midday found them on the heights, and Keven, at least, was spent and fagged. Purposely he had not looked back or down for hours—but always up the changing slopes.

Beryl led him to a ridgetop of the mountain, the last slow rise of which was black with mantle of firs. Up to this border a meadow almost on end had led, grassy, dotted with purple asters waving in the breeze. The air was thin and cool. Keven panted. He saw the heaving of Beryl's breast. They flung themselves down on the ground beneath a huge slanting slab of gray-green mossed rock.

"Look, Kev, look with my eyes," cried Beryl.

Keven saw only heavy pearl-white clouds, moving almost imperceptibly, closer than he had ever been to clouds, across the deep dark-azure sky. Then he looked down.

The grassy slope rounded its descent for a way, then fell precipitously a thousand feet, to check its headlong flight in an open cape fringed by firs. A troop of deer dotted the meadowlike promontory. And as Keven gazed a golden eagle sailed wide-winged and grand below him, so that he looked down upon its bright-flecked back.

That little halting bench did not prepare Keven for the blue gulf below.

How far down the firs, now mere needles of green, millions of them forming the thick black slopes of the canyon! But still deeper down a forest as of flaming fire leaped out of the void. A riot of yellow, of scarlet, of orange, of cerise, of purple, seen through smoky veils, blazed the truth of autumn. He swept his gaze farther down, holding his breath in anticipation of the river, but he saw only bits of gleaming brook and dancing white cascades like the wings of a white moth.

Up the colored mosaic of slope Keven's gaze traveled to the black dense belt, on and up to the crags and the bleached firs, grotesque and deformed, and higher still to be riveted on the peaks and domes of the mountains beyond. It was an endless field, with notched horizon as far as the sky, and leagues and leagues of unbroken forested slopes. Here was the mountain kingdom from which the numberless springs and brooks and streams sent their pure waters down to the father river.

Even before Keven sighted the Rogue he heard it, and instinctively he closed his eyes and turned his ear. Low and far away, deep down and faintly clear, its mellow roar! He pictured its long green sweeps, its white rapids, its broad still reaches under canyon walls, its majestic curves. But when he forced his eyelids open he saw, far, far down, only a winding broken blue ribbon with knots of white.

But gradually he realized that it was his river—that he was gazing from a great height into a valley ten miles wide at the top, and sheering down over endless slopes and shadows of forest, over wooded basins and black canyons, over labyrinthine mazes of gold and red and magenta, of bright spots

lost in the green, to the ragged iron cliffs, and to the tiny blue-and-silver thread between.

He watched then and no longer thought about what he saw. Even Beryl's head, finding his shoulder, seemed a fragrance and a caress of the senses. Her hand sought his, clung and rested there.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"Darn You Aards!"

KEVEN rode with Aard down the trail toward Illahe, leading pack mules, which were to be loaded with supplies for Solitude.

The sun did not break through the mist or dispel the frost until the riders were well below Missouri Bar. Opposite a still reach of river Aard halted his horse and pointed down.

"Let's watch a little," he said. "I see steelhead risin', an' if I don't miss my guess, here's the run Beryl is lookin' for."

It soon became manifest that a great school of steelhead was resting and rolling here. Below was a stiff fall, difficult for salmon and steelhead to ascend, and still farther down extended a long series of rapids, rocky and shallow, with no eddies.

These steelhead were spread up and down the still deep pool, and they showed close to the rocky walls, in the middle of the river, and everywhere. They rolled on the surface, they lazily broke water, and then a big one leaped, to thump back solidly. They were big fish. When they rolled they flapped the water with wide tails. Then another jumped, shining pink and

pearl in the light. The pool would become smooth for a moment, then suddenly show boils and splashes and ever-widening circles.

"Wal, that's the run of big ones," observed Aard. "Let's see. It's October eighth. Kev, did you ever wonder about these big steelhead never gettin' started upriver till after the canneries shut down October first?"

"Humph! Sure, it's funny," replied Keven.

"I reckon nothin' can or ever will be done about it, but it sure ought to be. Well, you'll have some good news for the lass. Mebbe she won't be tickled! Reckon this bunch will hang up at Missouri awhile an' then come on to Solitude."

They rode on. Below the long white-running stretch of rapids, where again the river slowed and stilled, Aard halted to point.

"Kev, there's the other an' better side of the story," he said.

"Little salmon going back to the sea!" exclaimed Keven, thrilled. Showers of tiny glittering glades and slivers of silver glinted in the sunlight. All along the whole stretch! Millions of baby salmon going down to the sea, to the home they knew only by instinct!

"Yes, that's the hopeful side. It always cheers me up," went on Aard. "Man is a greedy, destructive cuss. But nature is prolific an' resourceful. Those little salmon will come back when they are matured—some of them will get by the nets. An' so the cycle goes on. It's a blessed an' mysterious thing, son."

The trail led up off the open slope into the woods, where it wound, sunlight-streaked and shadow-barred, under the trees. It zigzagged in to head the canyons, where dark shades alternated with amber light, and the brooks

trickled over the mossy rocks. The gathering autumnal congregation of birds fluttered in flocks with sad requiem to the death of summer.

They reached Illahe about the middle of the morning, but owing to various delays did not get packed until afternoon. Keven, while waiting for Aard to do a last errand, espied two khaki-clad fishermen clambering wet and weary and fishless up from the river. One of them slopped down on the step while the other went into the store. A barefooted urchin edged closer to the fisherman, drawn by the shiny rod and reel.

"Sonny, your Rogue River is no good," declared the man.

"Oh, yes it is, Mister. You jest don't know how to ketch 'em," replied the lad.

The angler laughed and addressed Keven. "I suppose all you natives, young and old, think the same about city fishermen."

Keven laughed too. "I've got sort of that way myself."

"Excuse me. I took you for a native," said the man.

"No offense. But really it's a compliment," returned Keven, smiling.

"What are those flies in your hat?" queried the other.

"They're homemade," answered Keven, removing his hat. "Bumble Bee, Black Gnat, Tan Upright."

"Who tied these?" asked the fisherman curiously.

"A girl friend of mine," said Keven laconically.

"Trout don't rise to these things, do they?"

Keven laughed. "Steelhead not only rise to these, but they pile out on the rocks after them."

"Aw, go wan!" ejaculated the fisherman, and grinned like a boy.

"Straight goods," returned Keven. "Last Monday I caught nine steelhead on that Tan Upright. Largest, seven pounds. It's a pretty good fly, but she ties a still better one she calls Solitude. It's sure dynamite."

"Have you got one with you?"

"No, I'm sorry. I lost the last one. She wouldn't give me another. We had an argument about steelhead—she's a great fly-fisherman—and we fight a lot about tackle, method, theory, and no on."

"Would you sell these flies?"

"No, but you're welcome to them. And I'll give you a tip about fishing the lower Rogue, if you want it."

"Young man, we want it as badly as we need it," rejoined the other heartily. "We've fished the Stilliguamish, the Umpqua, and other famous rivers. Caught trout, too. But this Rogue *is* a rogue, believe me. Beautiful water. But we just can't raise fish."

"I had the same trouble. I thought I was a great fisherman till I struck the lower Rogue. I was beaten to smithereens by a girl."

"You don't say! She must be some fisherman."

"I'll say she is. Now let me give you a tip. Try those flies. Keep back from the shore and out of the water. Most steelhead lie along under the bars and rocks, close to shore. Cast a short line and draw your fly in. Make it dance or jiggle, like a fluttering bug."

"You are most kind, young fellow. I sure appreciate it. By the way, what's your name?"

"Bell. Keven Bell."

"I see you've been in the service," the other went on.

"Yes, sir," replied Keven, surprised.

"Excuse my being personal. By profession I am a dentist. And it's just a

habit for me to see things a layman wouldn't."

Keven then briefly told of his accident and its consequences. The fisherman exclaimed his sympathy and interest and then introduced himself.

"I am Dr. Allan Ames, and my friend is Dr. McIntire, an eye specialist. May I call him out to meet you?"

"Why—certainly," stammered Keven.

The other doctor was a stout little man with a merry face.

"Doc, shake hands with this young man, Keven Bell. He has done us a favor, giving us some killing flies and good advice about the river. We certainly must return the kindness. It seems the breechblock of a gun nearly blew his head off. Lost part of his lower jaw and injured his eye. He has not had proper treatment. Let's look him over."

They took Keven to the more secluded porch of the inn near by. When Keven removed his iron jaw Dr. Ames swore and his colleague stared his amazement.

"What a hideous contraption!" went on the dentist. "How could he ever have worn it?" Then he made a careful examination of Keven's mouth and jaw. "Compound fracture, with a section of bone missing. Unhealed tissue, and ulcerated stomatitis. Bell, you've had rather a bad time of it, haven't you?"

"Yes, Doctor. My mouth is sore always, and now and then it gets fearful. So I can't eat."

"You throw this iron junk away. I'll give you some medicine to use, and mail you more. Then when your mouth gets well come to my office in Portland and I'll fix you up."

"Wouldn't it cost a good deal?" asked Keven anxiously.

"Yes, it'll be expensive. You'll have to have a gold-and-platinum piece to fit in there, with teeth, of course. It must be heavy, so that its weight will hold it in place till the muscles grow accustomed to it."

"What would it cost?" asked Keven eagerly.

"I'll do it as cheaply as possible—say about five hundred dollars. It will be worth a million to you."

"Thank you, sir. I'll come, just as soon as I can raise the money."

"Don't wait too long for that. I'll trust you. Now, Doc, take a look at that bum lamp of his."

Whereupon Dr. McIntire bent over Keven and made close scrutiny of the injured eyeball, using a small magnifying glass.

"Not so bad, I'd say, on superficial examination," he said cheerfully. "Partial paralysis of the optic nerve, probably. Young man, you need a glass to do the focusing for that eye. I'll give you a shield to wear until you come to Portland. Don't strain that eye any more."

Then he went inside, to come out presently with a black eye shield attached to a rubber band.

"I always stick a few things like this in my kit, wherever I go," he said, adjusting the shield. "There now—doesn't that make the good eye feel better?"

"I think I can see better," replied Keven, as he gazed about him. "And I must keep this thing on?"

"Yes, when the light's bright. Early morning and late evening you needn't wear it. But as Doc here said, don't wait too long. I may help that eye to recover. At the least I can relieve the pain and the strain."

"Gentlemen, I surely thank you," replied Keven gratefully. "Give me your

addresses. I will go to Portland as soon as I can."

Keven took leave of them presently and, returning to the store, found Aard waiting with the last mule packed.

"Hey, what's happened to you?" he ejaculated, gaping at Keven's transformed features.

"Aard, do I look very bad?"

"Terrible. Like someone blacked your eye and kicked in your chin."

Then with eager excitement Keven imparted his good news.

"Doggone my picture! Kev, I reckon you should go to Portland soon. Anyways before the snow sets in."

"But, Aard, I must earn the money first."

"I'll lend you the money."

"You will not—you bighearted backwoodsman," declared Keven. "You've already done more for me than I can ever repay."

"Wal, it's between friends. An' you're doin' a lot for me."

"Humph! I'd like to know what."

"You're makin' my lass happy. She's been a different girl since you came. Let's hit the trail."

SOLITUDE was veiled in its transparent shadows of pink and lilac, of golden rays that pierced through the trees.

Keven was in the lead, with the line of bobbing pack mules between him and Aard. Beryl came running out onto the cabin porch when she caught sight of Keven's face, she took a hesitating step and halted.

"Howdy, Solitude," said Keven, and he knew his voice was gruff and strange, because of the removal of his iron jaw.

"Kev! You've—you've—"

"I should smile I have—if you mean got my face pushed in," interrupted Keven.

"Oh! A fight?"

Then he related his experience with the doctors and concluded, "All because I gave one of them those three dinkey flies of yours!"

"Kev Bell! You will make me angry someday," she said gravely. "I'm very, very happy for you," she added softly.

After supper, when Aard had gone early to bed, Beryl left Keven before the fire and went to her room. Presently she returned and laid a goodly roll of bills upon his lap.

"There, Kev. Go to Portland at once," she said.

"You too? Darn you Aards!" He fingered the money. "Beryl, I thank you with all my heart. You're just the best girl ever. But I can't take it."

"Why not, Kev?" she asked softly.

"I—I suppose because I'm not sure how or when I could ever pay it back," he replied.

"If our situations were reversed I would take it from you," she said.

"That is different, Beryl. You are a woman and I'm a man."

"Why is it different?"

"I suppose because custom has made a man feel he could help a woman, but he could not take money from her."

"Oh, I—see," she said curtly.

Keven stood up and gazed straight into the proud hurt eyes. Smiling he returned the money.

"Beryl, you save this till I earn enough to pay for that dental job. You'll need it—for you'll be going with me."

She actually staggered back.

"Going with you?" she whispered, utterly bewildered.

"Why, sure. At least I hope you will," he hastened to respond.

"Keven!" Then with a gasp she fled.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

An Oregon Day . . .

THE dark gray dawn came with a breath of frost from the high peaks above the singing river. October was well on its way.

Keven took to the long, tunnel-like trail through the forest; and, rod in hand, with the spring of a mountaineer in his step, with dancing blood, and his mind full of expectation of the long, long hours to come, he brushed the asters aside and trod the fallen leaves.

At the head of Solitude Valley, where the river turned north to seem lost in the gloom of the walled canyon, Keven struck off the trail and descended out of the woods to the open bank. He saw his own footprints, three weeks old, in a strip of sand which ran between the brush and the boulders of the river-bank. Deer tracks showed their cloven marks, and otter and mink and other wild denizens of the forest made their patterns, but Keven's were the only ones contributed by man.

He sat down on a flat rock at the edge of the water and dropped his leader in to let it soak thoroughly before attaching a fly. A familiar pleasurable sensation ran along his veins. The long, long day was all before him, and here ran the glancing river. From far above the dark bend floated a very faint, almost indistinguishable song of running waters; from far below where the river wound out of the jealous clutch of Solitude came the same voice, though of different note and melody.

The gray curtain of mist overhead was as dense as fog; it hid the mountain slopes; it had not yet begun to rise

or move. The light under the cloud bank was dull gray, and the river reflected it, except in places where a thin cold vapor rose off the surface. A flock of wild ducks bore down to swoop up over Keven's head and whistle on. They had white barred wings. He saw them streak down to the ledge pool above Solitude and make long sliding splashes as they alighted.

No other signs of life were manifest. The river might have been empty of steelhead and salmon, for any disturbance on its somber gliding surface. They might be there in the favorite resting-places and then again they might not.

Keven picked up his leader and stretched it, before attaching it to his line. Then he applied himself to the task of choosing a fly. He had many, but only a few favorites, any one of which he was loath to start in with so early. So he selected a Coachman.

There beside the rock lay the strong sharpened staff which he used to aid him in wading across the river. He noted that the water was half a foot lower than when he had crossed last time. This would render the task far easier and lessen the risk. He waded in boldly, soon to discover that though the water was low and without swift current there, it was far colder than before. It made him jump, and he was at some pains to go slowly, lining his marks on the bank, so that he could keep to the shallows. When the water edged up from his knees to his hips it was all he could do to step cautiously; and when he reached the center of the river, to be immersed up to his waist, the icy touch was breathtaking.

On the opposite bank he laid aside rod and staff to exercise briskly. His hands were numb and his legs shaking.

Presently his blood was running free and warm again. Then, rod in hand, he stepped to the river, facing down-stream.

Keven made his first cast, and time was annihilated. When next he looked up, the valley had lightened; dark blue rifts showed in the rising canopy of mist; the river seemed strangely, vastly changed. He marveled at it. Again he sat down, just to look and listen. Spots of color stood out of the dark green; the gray shadow in the notch where the river disappeared had turned to purple. There came the wild sweet rising and falling notes of a water ouzel, herald of the sunrise.

He resumed fishing, and eventually changed his fly to a favorite he had named Beryl. He had tied it himself, to Beryl's vast amusement. Somehow he just had to name it after her.

On his first cast with this new fly he raised and hooked a steelhead; and there came another change in the world. With a five-pounder on his string the long, long day had begun.

Some time after that a broad bar of pink and silver flashed under Keven's fly. Another cast again raised this giant of a steelhead. He rose boldly, he showed clearly, but he missed the fly and turned to leave a hole in the water. Keven let out gaspingly the breath he had held for tingling seconds.

Then with the lust of battle seizing him, and the sheer unrealized joy of his environment, Keven set himself to outwit that king of trout. He raised the wary, lazy, gorgeous monster many times, but all in vain. Curiosity was not hunger; play was not feeding. And at last that deep dark eddy hole under the golden ledge of rock became blank.

Keven went on. The color or ripple of a rising trout would set him to vigorously casting, until he either caught

the fish or put it down. He watched two playful otters for a long time, as sure that they saw him as he was that he saw them. Halfway down to Solitude the singing of the river swelled to deep and murmuring music. Small trout, crayfish, water spiders all came in for serious attention. He just watched them, after the abstracted manner of an Indian.

All at once something drew his interest from the level of the flowing river. The valley burned gold and purple; clouds had melted away in the radiant blue; the mountain slopes seemed bursting in full autumnal glory, the dark green boldly infringed upon by the reds, the scarlets, the cerise and magenta, and the dominating splashes of gold. And there under it all wound and murmured the river in an endless solitude. It descended upon Keven like a mantle, it enveloped him, it bore the warmth of the sun and the fragrance of the forest. He looked and looked, felt it all as one in a dream, and went on fishing.

Everything was an event. A yellow leaf fluttered down from the high slope to alight upon his arm. A yellow oak leaf, with tinge of bronze and hint of green. It suggested the dry colorful aisles of the oak forests, high above the river, where the deer browsed for acorns, the wild pigeons fluttered, and the doves mourned. He put the stem in his mouth.

The river sang on, glided on, ever the same, yet ever changing. It shaded from green to gold, and then to a deep rose. The rapid below appeared crested with fire. But again, as so many times before this day, a rising steelhead claimed Keven's attention. He caught that one—and another—before he noticed that the color of the river had

again changed. It was deep rich purple, like the shadows in the bends of the fir slopes. Presently he found it hard to see his way.

Looking up, he stood aghast. "What! Night already?"

THE HOUNDS bayed Keven welcome as he staggered into the dusk of the clearing under his load of trout. Beryl ran out onto the porch.

"Oh, Kev, you had a fine day!" she cried. "How many?"

"Nineteen, I think," he replied lightly, as if that were nothing for him.

Beryl touched several of Keven's string of beauties with the toe of her boot.

"Under five pounds, Kev. You should have let these go."

"What? Why, they'll weigh six, at least."

"Ump-umm, my boy," she returned, shaking her head. "You can't see a steelhead right. Your eyes magnify. It's the habit of a novice."

"Novice! Me? With nineteen to my credit?"

"Kev, you're still a city fisherman," she replied.

"What did *you* do today, may I ask?"

"Oh, I had a lot of work before I went out. But I didn't lose much. You know steelhead won't rise when the mist is on the river. Dad went down to Missouri. So I followed this afternoon."

"Did you catch any?" queried Keven, as if forced.

"We had a good day, especially after the sun was off the water."

"Humph! How many?"

"Thirty-four," replied Beryl nonchalantly.

"Thirty-four what?"

"Why, steelhead, you goose. And I let my little ones go."

"How many did you catch out of that thirty-four?"

"Sorry to top you, Keven. I got twenty-one."

Keven gazed up from his string of fish to Beryl. It was not yet so dark that he could not see fairly well. She seemed calm and demure, but he felt that she was bursting with glee.

"Beryl, I don't love you any more," he said gravely, and moved away toward his cabin. He had gone a number of steps when a trill of laughter rent the silence.

"You're just in time to change for supper, Kev," she called after him.

He did not hurry, nevertheless, and pondered more than usual. The day had been one long enchantment.

When he presented himself in the bright cozy living-room, sight of Beryl made his heart leap, while he set his lips grimly. Beryl had on that marvelous white dress. It might have been a simple inexpensive one, as she claimed, but when she had it on he could not take his eyes off her. It gave her grace, yet not only did it not deny her bounteous contours, but enhanced them. Then it brought out in vivid relief her rich coloring, the brilliance of her dark eyes, the luster of her hair. She smiled at Keven a little wistfully.

"Wal, son, it sure was one of the Oregon days," remarked Aard, taking his seat. "Set down, an' don't stare at Beryl as if she wouldn't last in that dress. I don't blame you much, though. She's an eye-ful."

"Yes, it was an Oregon day," replied Keven, breathing deeply as he sat down, still with his gaze riveted upon Beryl.

Presently she observed that his long

day on the river, and his wonderful luck, had not given him much of an appetite.

"Sure, I'm hungry, Beryl, but it's getting harder all the time to eat without half enough teeth," he replied. But though he spoke jokingly Beryl evidently sensed his mood.

"Kev, you better take my advice an' not put off your trip to Portland till spring," interposed Aard.

"It's easier to take advice than money," returned Keven seriously.

"Wal, sometimes, yes. But you've come to be like a son to me, an' what's mine is yours."

"Aard, my feelings for you and—and Beryl—don't square the deal," said Keven stubbornly, though he was glad the subject had been broached.

Beryl's downcast eyes were fixed upon her plate. Nevertheless Keven's deliberate gaze drew her own. Suddenly she blushed scarlet.

"Kev, seems to me you worry a lot. Let well enough alone. You've got husky and strong. That was the main thing we wanted, wasn't it? Solitude has done much for you."

"More than I ever hoped for," murmured Keven.

"Wal, it'll give you peace someday. But not till you stop frettin' an' fightin' in'."

Aard spoke to Keven, yet his kindly words seemed to embrace Beryl. They finished the meal in silence.

"Wal, one pipe will about do me tonight," said Aard, as he stirred the smoldering fire and threw on some pine cones. "Kev, you miss a lot by not smokin' a pipe. Sure, Beryl says tobacco is dirty an' she wouldn't kiss no man who used it. Reckon that accounts. But nothin' soothes me like smokin'."

Keven took the other chair. Beryl, with her apron on, helped the Indian woman clear off the table. Every time she returned from the kitchen her dark eyes sought Keven's, as if she were impelled against her will. And every time Keven sustained a thrill.

"There's some whoopin' big steelhead in the river now," said Aard. "But we oughtn't ketch any more till we've smoked what we got."

"We'll help. Gosh, I hate to miss any of this run," replied Keven.

"Wal, I reckon they'll hang around a week or so. River's low now. Did you raise any wallopers today?"

"One. He was three feet long and a foot deep. I raised him a dozen times. But he was only playing with me. If I had hooked him I'd be somewhere on the way to Gold Beach right now."

"I had hold of a couple of elephants. Couldn't do a thing. The first one went downstream an' cleaned me out. The second went upstream. Busted my rod. How Beryl did laugh! That girl gets an infernal joy out of my fishin' misfortunes."

"She sure does. I suppose it's just the natural cussedness of the born angler."

"Reckon so. She can afford to enjoy it. For she's a wonder with a rod. Kev, she nailed an eleven-pounder today, right in the middle of Missouri, an' she licked him without movin' out of her tracks."

"Eleven pounds! Lord, how does she do it, Aard?"

"Wal, she uses light stuff an' she lets a fish run. We men can't help horsin' a fightin' steelhead. It's the nature of the male. Beryl has a trout gettin' tired before he knows there's anythin' very wrong."

"I can't let them run. I want to stop them," admitted Keven.

"Same here. I reckon we'll just have to swallow Beryl's gift an' luck. Because it's both. Don't ever overlook luck. Some fishermen have it. Some haven't. I'm an unlucky member of the family."

"So am I."

"This afternoon, whenever I happened to look at Beryl, she was playin' a fish. She must have let more go than she kept. I keep tellin' Beryl the small steelhead are best for smokin'. But she keeps on lettin' them go."

When Beryl came in a little constraint fell upon the group. Aard smoked out his pipe in silence, then, rising, he knocked the ashes out and laid it on the mantel. Beryl stood at the open door, gazing out into the blackness. The river music floated up, mellow and sad. Aard threw some more cones on the fire, and then a couple of oak fagots.

"Shut the door, lass. Can't you feel the cold creepin' down from the hills?"

"Cold! I thought it was so close indoors," returned Beryl, as she complied with his wish.

"I know what you mean. I felt that too," said Aard with dry humor, and he winked at Keven. "Sort of sultry thunderous atmosphere around. Like lightning's goin' to strike soon."

"Oh—not like that—at all," exclaimed Beryl in confusion.

"Kev, what do you think it's like?" went on Aard.

"What's like?"

"Wal, the atmosphere around."

"Very cozy, comfortable, just wonderful—if only—"

"Ahuh. Wal, I'll turn in an' I bet it'd take a fifty-foot raise in the river to wake me. So don't you young folks

feel afraid to talk, fight, wrasse—anythin', so long as you come out of it. Good night."

"*Dad!*" ejaculated Beryl hotly.

"What do you know about that?" added Keven, after Aard had gone to his room.

"I don't know anything," retorted Beryl.

"Come sit down. Why do you hang back there in the shadow? Lord knows you're pretty enough to want to be seen."

"It depends upon whom I'm with," rejoined Beryl, slowly coming forward to take the chair on the other side of the table. The large white-globed lamp hid her face.

"I overheard you and Dad talking about me being a lucky fisherman," began Beryl. "That's just like two men. Because I beat you to a frazzle you put it down to luck. But neither of you—"

"Oh, Beryl, stop kidding me," interrupted Keven. "Once for all you've got me trimmed as a fisherman. I'm not in your class. I'm only a dub—a hick-town fisherman. Now does that satisfy you?"

"Satisfy me! No—it doesn't," replied Beryl, somewhat mystified and shocked. "What do you want to talk about, if it's not fish?"

"I want to think," he snapped.

Whereupon silence ensued. Keven gazed piercingly into the opal heart of the fire, as if that would set his mind working. It seemed to be whirling with thoughts, none of which were coherent, or at least what he wanted. But he did not know what he wanted.

Presently Beryl's voice came as from a distance.

"Pardon. What did you say?" he replied.

"I said you'd been thinking a whole half hour and must be having a very good time."

"I was. Ha! Ha!" returned Keven hollowly.

"Well, I'm not. Perhaps you'd enjoy yourself still more if I make myself scarce."

"Perhaps. Oh, I don't know, I'm in a funny state. I want to think, but I can't."

"Kev Bell, I'm having some thoughts, if you're not."

"Indeed?" queried Keven flippantly.

"Yes *indeed*. And they're not flattering to you. Kev Bell, I—I don't understand you. If you're just miffed again with me because I beat you fishing—"

"Cut that out," cried Keven, stung. "I never thought of fishing. Not once. I'm sick of fishing. I hate the river. I'll never—never go again."

"You hate—you *hate* my river—my beautiful, singing river?" she asked in a low shocked voice.

"Yes, I do," he replied harshly.

"Oh, Kev!" she cried, and she rose to her feet. "So *that's* it! I knew something was wrong. You're tired of Solitude—of *me*! You're going away?"

"Ha! Ha!" laughed Keven wildly. But this was getting somewhere. If he could only get his hands on her!

"You—you add insult to injury," she flashed. "Good night."

As she stepped to pass Keven he snatched at her, violently pulled her off balance. Staggering, with angry cry, she fell full length into his arms. Only her feet rested upon the floor.

"How—dare you!" she cried, in furious amaze, and she struggled. "Let me up."

Keven wrapped his arms around her and crushed her to him, so that for the moment she was helpless. She strained to free her arms.

"Beryl! I love you so terribly—it's killing me," he exclaimed huskily.

All that fierce, hard muscular contraction of her body relaxed as if by magic. She sagged limp and heavy upon him.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

... *And a Night*

LIE still—maybe now I can think," commanded Keven, as Beryl made weak and ineffectual efforts to move.

"Let—me—breathe," she replied in a panting whisper.

Then Keven loosened the coil of his arms, though not enough to let her get up.

"Beryl, I love you so terribly—it's killing me," he repeated passionately.

"But—that's no reason—to hold me—so—so disgracefully," she panted.

"Yes, it is. What do I care how I hold you?"

"Please, Keven," she implored. "Kev, let me up, I beg you. This is undignified—not to say shameless."

"Dignity—shame—and all the rest can go hang. I love you!"

"But—you're hurting me," she went on. "I can't stand it—long. You'll break something."

"Promise me you won't run off," he demanded sternly.

"I—promise," she whispered.

Then he released her.

"Bear!" she exclaimed. Her bosom was heaving, her face dusky red. Then she got up, smoothed down her disordered dress, and sat down on the arm of his chair. Slipping her right arm round his neck, she leaned to him.

"Kev, say that again—then you can think all night long and I won't move," she whispered.

"Say what again?"

"I mean that about—what was killing you."

"Beryl, I love you so terribly—it's killing me," he complied, even more passionately than before.

She appeared to wilt against him. Then a quivering ran all over her. It wore away and came again. She moved and soft lips pressed against his face.

"Don't kiss me, Beryl. Not yet! If you do that I—I'll eat you up. I want a million kisses."

"Begin," she retorted.

"No!"

"Yes. I want two million. Kev, darling, I've waited so long."

"Good God! Don't reproach me. Don't say such things. That you love me *at all!*"

"At all? I love you with every last drop of my heart's blood!"

"But I—I must think," cried Keven.

"What about? If it's me—all right."

"Of course it's you. Everything is you."

"Very well, then," she whispered softly.

With Beryl surrendering to his arms, sweet as he had dreamed she would be, Keven felt an exultation that had no need of thought. There was no longer any problem. Beryl lay in his arms, not only a willing prisoner, but a responsive one. Her cheek was again on his and now he felt her tears.

The oak wood burned like golden pearls on fire with life and love. Keven could peer into it penetratingly, only to see the shimmering glow. It inspired no flaming thoughts.

"Oh, Beryl, I can't think. Nothing comes," he burst out.

"Don't try, then. Talk to me—and if you can't do that—love me."

"But I must talk!"

"Go ahead, darling. Maybe I can help to ease your mind. Dad had it right. You worry. Tell me your trouble, Keven."

"It's—I—I can't *stand* this—this situation here any longer," declared Keven.

"Neither can I," she laughed, as she rubbed her cheek against his. "But what do *you* mean, Mister Contrary?"

"I want things settled between you and me."

"They appear to be settling very well," she rejoined demurely. "Here I am on your lap—at last. But I feared I'd never get there."

"Don't be funny, you little Indian devil. This is serious."

"Kev, nothing can bother me now," she whispered.

"You love me?"

"I worship you," she said steadfastly.

"You must have me?"

"I'll die if I don't."

"Poor crippled beggar that I am!"

"Hush!" She put a soft hand over his lips. "No more such talk! You have grown well and strong. Soon those—those injuries will be repaired—perhaps wholly cured. You are my handsome, wonderful man."

"Beryl, will you—will you marry me?" he asked hoarsely.

"Yes."

"When? How soon?"

"Tomorrow."

The word was spoken with sweet nonchalance. Keven longed to let all restraint fly to the winds and give up to the joy she was creating in him. But he only held her tighter.

"Beryl, I thought *this* would be hard, if I dared think it at all. But it's easy. Will you lend me the—the money for the Portland trip? For *both* of us! You will have to go."

"Oh, Kev—yes—yes."

"Will you swear you'll let me pay that money back, if only a dollar at a time?" he asked.

"I swear."

He held her then in an eloquent silence. After all, how simple she had made it for him! Why had he not had courage before?"

"We'll go to Portland. We must figure our expenses very carefully. I want to put aside enough to buy you the finest outfit you ever saw. This will be to knock 'em stiff in Grant's Pass. What a surprise for Dad! No doubt he believes me dead. I've never written him. I just didn't know what to tell him. But now we'll go home, as soon as the doctors fix me up. Oh, it'll be great to go—I never guessed what it'd mean, till now. To see Dad—to see my friend Minton. To show you off to Rosamond Brandeth and Gus Atwell! Maybe that won't be grand? It'll be revenge enough. If my old pard Garry was only alive! What would he say at sight of you?"

"Kev, it'll be a—a honeymoon," whispered Beryl rapturously.

"You will never regret?"

"Never, darling."

"Very well. Beryl, did you hint that you were starved for kisses?"

"I didn't *hint*. I said so."

"Kiss me first. Then we'll see."

She pecked at his ear with tight lips, and just brushed his cheek, then after a pause, tenderly and lovingly kissed that sunken line of his jaw.

"Kev, do you remember," she began, feeling the injured place with fingers as tender as her lips, "do you remember that horrible time when—when I struck you?"

"Remember? Huh, I should smile I do!"

"Have you wholly forgiven me?"

"Of course, honey. I didn't blame you for lambasting me one. I must have been damn exasperating."

"You were. But I've never forgiven myself," she murmured. "I—"

"See here, you're falling down on the job already," interrupted Keven.

"Wha-at job?" she asked, giggling.

"Why, the rest of your future. It will consist solely of kissing me morning, noon, and night. My God, I love you, Beryl! It's changed my whole life. And if I were a whole man once more I'd be happy. I'd ask no more than to be with you and work."

"I'm happy *now*. I can confess now that for a year or more before you came back I—I was afraid you'd forgotten—not me exactly, but that you loved me."

Full confession on that score trembled on Keven's lips, but reluctance to hurt Beryl kept him silent. What was the need to tell her now?

"It seems to me what matters now is the absolute certainty that I love you. No girl ever before meant so much to a man. You have saved me. I was broken, wretched, ruined. And as sure as heaven, if I had got by Solitude I would have killed Atwell and then myself."

"God would never have let you get by Solitude," returned Beryl solemnly.

"We'll have lots to talk about when we come back home. Married! Man and wife! Beryl, call me husband."

"How can I—yet?"

"I want to hear how it sounds. All this is so darned incredible."

"It's very real to me," murmured Beryl. "*Husband!* How does it sound?"

"It'd be wonderful if you weren't so awed. Beryl, after all, I'm only an ordinary mortal."

"You!"

"Well, then, what have I been to you and what am I now?"

"You were my first and only boy friend. Then my sweetheart, my soldier-hero, my absent master, my returned lover—and soon—my husband."

Suddenly in a passion of realization, of gratitude and love, he fell to kissing her.

"Oh . . . Kev! . . . There! . . . No more! . . . Mercy! . . . Darl—ing—I—I didn't mean . . . Oh, Kev, you're strangling me. I—"

But he did not desist until he was exhausted and she lay white and spent back upon his shoulder. More than all else, that had been what he craved: the bliss of this indulgence, the all-satisfying surrender to it, and the supreme proof of his mastery.

"Beryl, I—I had to do that," he exclaimed hoarsely, as he slowly recovered. "But I promise I'll not have another brainstorm—anyway, not till after we're married. Now, open your eyes, and sit up. We've got to get down to brass tacks."

"What're you—going to do? Finish me at one—fell swoop?" Her tone was plaintive and she was smiling.

"You would tantalize me! Now, Beryl, come out of your trance. We'll leave for Portland tomorrow, and we've planned as far as Grant's Pass. We'll have our fling there. Buy all the stuff we've got money left to buy. New tackle for you to fuss over this winter—books to study and read—oh, everything."

"And a rifle for you, Kev. Do you know you're making me so, so happy I—I—" She could not find adequate words.

"Am I? Good, but I haven't started yet. We'll be away about two weeks. Let's see."

"That's just fine. It'll be Indian summer then."

"Indian summer is all right. But I've got to work. You'll be moving over into my cabin then. It'll have to be fixed up comfortably."

"Indeed it will. We must get no end of things," she said.

"But honey, we must not go in debt," declared Keven earnestly.

"Debt? Did I say anything about that? I suppose you think I'll make a wildly extravagant wife?"

"Lord, I hope not. You'll sure make an adorable one. But we'll be poor. And we must live on my labor. Can't you understand?"

"I'm trying hard, you dear old goose."

"Well then, no going in debt. Promise?"

"Yes," she replied, with dark eyes studying him.

"That trip will cost us all the five hundred dollars you have—which you'll lend me. Gosh, we'll have to stretch it. But those Portland doctors will be easy on me."

"Kev, I'm afraid five hundred won't be enough."

"It'll *have* to be."

"Dad would lend you a little."

"Now, Beryl! No!"

"Well, then, he might give *us* a little wedding present."

"Ahuh. Beryl, when we come home I'll go to work in earnest. At whatever Aard gives me to do. Trapping first—"

"No, Keven, darling, you won't take up trapping," she interrupted calmly.

"What have you against trapping?"

"It's horribly cruel."

"Yes, I suppose it is. I fear I'll have to do it without your consent."

"No, you won't."

"See here, who says I won't?"

"I do. But let's put that question off till we come home."

"A good idea. The thing is I'll go to work. Perhaps you have not thought so far ahead as I have."

"I've thought pretty far, Mister."

"Beryl, honey, listen," he went on. "Solitude will be home. And I know I will love it more and more. Our wants are few. I will develop a fruit farm here. Many men have been successful up the river. Why not here? But I shall not want to keep you stuck in the woods all the time. When we can afford it, I will take you out. You'd like to see Frisco, wouldn't you, and Southern California?"

"Yes, but I'd not care a rap if I never did."

"The winters are long here."

"Surely. And they're lovely. Just you wait."

"Could you be happy if we *never* left Solitude?"

"You bet I could—if *you* could."

"Doggone you, anyway," returned Keven good-humoredly. "I'll have to get down to the brass tacks I mentioned."

"Ahuh." She imitated him dryly.

"You want babies, don't you?" he launched at her abruptly.

"Yes, of course I—I do," she whispered.

"How much do you want them?"

"Oh—very—very much."

"Very soon?"

"Not—so—very."

"How many?"

"Oh, Kev, such things to ask a girl!"

"I know, darling, but you see, you're not making a very good matrimonial venture. I want to *know*—right before we start."

"Well, I'd like to have two children at least, a boy and a girl."

"Good. I'm absolutely in accord with you there. Well, the reason for all this embarrassing quiz of mine hinges on possible children. What's your idea of school for our little Beryl and Kev to come?"

She laughed merrily. "Keven, there's a country school at Agness. Surely in a few years there'll be schools at Illahe and Marial."

"But I'd want them to have the advantages of good schools."

"I agree, Keven."

"Then would you be willing to live in Roseburg or Grant's Pass, while they went to school? I mean only a few months—or at most a part of each year."

"Yes indeed, I would, provided you lived with us."

"Well, I guess. If I couldn't, I fear our little Bells would grow up Rogue River Indians. Beryl, you're the most satisfactory sweetheart I ever had."

"Kev Bell, you swore you never had a sweetheart at all before me!"

"When did I swear that?"

"It was one afternoon, nearly five years ago. We were down by the river. We'd had an awful row. Well, we made up, and it was then—"

"Beryl, pray spare me any further details," he interrupted ruefully.

Beryl laughed.

"Beryl, to be serious again, you've changed my whole world this night," said Keven gratefully. "My God, the sheer luck of it! After all the agony of those two years in a hospital—and my failing and sinking afterward—to meet you again, to find in you such a faithful sweetheart!"

"Kev, darling, don't praise me so," she replied, and she pressed his head to her breast, then released him and rose to her feet. "I am only human.

Lately I've had my doubts, my fears. But since you *do* love me and you *do* share my feeling for Solitude all is well. I could not be happier. Look, it is late. Let's go out and listen to the river—then say good night. Tomorrow I must be up early to pack for our adventure. Kev, it is almost too good to be true!"

They went outdoors. The night was dark. They great black slopes sheered up to the strip of blue sky, studded with white stars. Keven drew Beryl into his arms.

Through the incredible stillness the low murmur of the river seemed to have a supernatural significance. It was a gentle and singing sound, full of mystery. The last shadow of materialism faded out of Keven Bell forever. He absorbed the meaning and the strength of Solitude. He accepted the love of this girl as something as infinite as the Nature which had created her.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Man and Wife

NEXT morning, early as Keven arose, it was not early enough to be ahead of Beryl. He heard her gay voice rousing Aard and the Indian housekeeper. Keven packed his one good suit.

"Doggone!" he soliloquized. "No white shirts or anything. No civilized hat. To get on a train—to be in a crowded city with a handsome girl—to see every Tom, Dick, and Harry rubbing at the backwoods guy with her—gosh!"

As he went out Beryl hailed him gaily from the porch of the other cabin.

"Laggard! Late on your wedding day!"

"I'd been here sooner if I'd known you were going to look like this," he replied.

"Like what?"

"So lovely."

"Kev, things have gone to my head. Oh, Kev—it's won—der—ful."

"Beryl, did you tell your father?" asked Keven.

"Not me. That's your job."

"Where is he now?"

"I hear him now—in the living-room." Beryl kissed Keven and then fled.

Just then Aard appeared on the porch, catching sight of Keven and the fleeing Beryl.

"Hey, son, what's all this rarin' around so early?" he queried.

"Beryl and I are going away to be married," Keven blurted out. Then he grew suddenly weak and frightened.

"Thank the Lord!" ejaculated Aard heartily. "It's about time."

"Aw—I—we—it's sure sudden, Aard," stammered Keven. "Last night it all came out. I'd spoken to you first, sir, if—if I'd had any idea. But it was just—just like a dam bursting. I love that girl so—so terribly it was killing me."

"Wal, son, I reckon you won't die if it's Beryl you want," said Aard with a smile. "I'm downright glad, Kev."

"You're awful—good," rejoined Keven huskily. "I hope I can repay you and Beryl—for your faith in me. I—"

"Chuck all that, son," said Aard. "Let's go in to breakfast. I see Beryl ran off to let you brace the old man alone."

As they entered the living-room, Beryl appeared from the kitchen.

"Oh—Daddy—Kev—is everything all right?" she panted.

"Daughter, I've had a shock," Aard said gravely.

"Shock! Why, Daddy—it—it oughtn't have been."

"Do you love this young man?"

"Love him? Of course I do. I—I should think anyone could have seen that."

"You have acted sort of queer lately. Wal, I reckon I ought to withhold my consent."

"Father!"

"Keven is a mighty fine boy," went on Aard calmly. "How do I know you won't mistreat him? Lord knows he's had sorrow enough."

Enlightenment did not dawn swiftly upon Beryl.

"Lass, I might give you to Keven on one condition," went on Aard. "That you quit fishin' an' leave the river to him an' me."

Beryl stared bewildered. Then: "Vil-lains! You put up a job on me. Oh, I went stiff and cold. Never! *Never!* I can beat you both—and I always will." She ran into her father's widespread arms.

"Wal, let's have breakfast," said Aard, and with an arm around the happy girl he led her to the table. "An', son, tell me your plans."

Keven soon told them.

"Wal, I reckon they can be improved on," replied Aard presently. "You might have the trip to Agness all for nothin'. The preacher comes there only twice a month. Likely you'd miss him. An' the natives down river are a gossipy lot. Of course, if you're not in any *hurry* to be married—"

"We are. At least *I* am," replied Keven quickly.

"So am I," said Beryl quickly.

"Haw! Haw! Wal, I've an idea. Suppose you go out by way of West Fork. There's a good trail that crosses the mountains up here. I'll go with you.

So it won't look like you're elopin'. Haw! Haw! You can catch a train goin' south to the Pass or goin' north to Portland."

"We must go to Portland first," spoke up Keven.

"If we pack an' saddle up quick we can make it to West Fork by sundown."

"Fine. Let's go that way," acquiesced Keven.

"But there's one drawback," interposed Beryl, blushing rosy red. "We can't be married at West Fork. No preacher."

"Beryl! We can't be married today?" Keven ejaculated.

"I'm afraid not, Kev," she replied mournfully.

"Wal, don't take on so," interposed Aard. "It's no great matter whether you get married today or tomorrow, is it? We'll rustle right on the trail. I'll see you off at West Fork. You'll get to Portland sometime tomorrow. Five o'clock if you catch the train I go on. Then you can get married—an' everything will be lovely."

"I—I g-guess that'll be all right," said Beryl dubiously.

"But, Aard—it isn't just—the proper thing for me to take Beryl that way," objected Keven, quite flustered. "Suppose we meet someone on the train. People from Grant's Pass who know me. Gus Atwell, for instance or—or Rosamond Brandeth. I couldn't introduce Beryl as my wife."

"Sure, you could, if you got in a pinch," declared Aard.

Beryl gazed mutely at Keven and he stared back at her.

"Your old friends aren't goin' to ask to see your marriage certificate, are they?" inquired Aard.

"It wouldn't be beyond Rosamond Brandeth," returned Keven.

"What do we—you—care about her?"

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing," replied Keven confusedly.

"If Dad says it's all right I'll go," added Beryl.

"Sure, it's all right," put in Aard coolly. "You needn't take a Pullman. I always go in a day coach. Set up an' sleep some. You can do it."

"Well, that's better," agreed Keven, greatly relieved.

"I'll go out an' saddle up," said Aard, rising. "Lucky I have some horses in. Don't waste any more time, children."

Keven had almost finished his breakfast when Beryl turned to him.

"Kev, you looked and spoke sort of funny," she said.

"How so?"

"Was that Brandeth girl in love with you?" asked Beryl.

"Oh, Lord, no!" exclaimed Keven.

"Are you ashamed to have her see you with me?"

"No, darling. On the contrary I would burst with pride."

She was reassured. "Honey, I had a queer burn deep inside me," exclaimed Beryl, with her hand over her heart. "I believe it was jealousy."

"Nonsense. It's indigestion. Come now."

"Wait, Kev. Let me give you the money before I forget. And I must fix some sandwiches. But I'll be ready before you are." She ran to her room.

In less than an hour they were riding north on the river trail. By nine o'clock they were climbing the slope above Winkle Bar. The higher they mounted the more glorious seemed the golden forest and the blue river.

At Nine Mile they halted for lunch, with Aard making sly jokes, Beryl gay, and Keven trying to realize why he should have been so crowned by the

gods. From Nine Mile the trail led downhill. For long they rode in the fragrant shade of giant firs. When the early mountain sunset fell they rode down into West Fork.

Aard returned to where he had left them waiting with the information that they had ample time to change their clothes and have supper before their train time.

Then, before Keven realized it, they were at the station. Aard was saying, "I reckon I better leave the horses here. No need of my comin' in for you. I'll expect you along in about two weeks."

A deep, low, hollow whistle came from round the narrow turn.

"Thar she comes."

Keven felt Beryl squeeze his arm. Then she was kissing her father. The train rolled in with tremendous roar and clatter.

"Wal, son, it comes to every man once in his life," Aard said, gripping Keven. "Be good to her. Lass, I 'most forgot somethin'. Here. A weddin' present for you an' Kev. Good-by."

Then they were on the platform waving. The train jerked. Faces passed out of sight. Keven saw Beryl sitting by the train window, gazing out with wet and softened eyes. He sat down beside her.

Dusk fell all too soon. The brakeman lit the car lights. They let go of each other's hands and sat up to try to appear natural. Presently to Keven's amaze he discovered that none of the other passengers were paying any attention to them. They talked then of everything except the tremendous adventure upon which they were embarked.

The train thundered on. At length it passed out of the mountainous coun-

try. After Roseburg the brakeman turned off the lights, except one at each end. Passengers settled back in their seats.

Keven felt too excited for sleep, though he was tired from the unaccustomed ride on horseback. Beryl's presence was a continual delight. In the shadow she gradually nestled close to him, and she went to sleep with her hand clasped in his and her head on his shoulder. After that, time seemed annihilated. Somewhere late in the night the train slowed abruptly with roar and jerk. It awakened Beryl, who, like a child, asked where she was. Keven kissed her.

On through the night rushed the train. Keven drowsily thought that at this rate he and Beryl would be married very soon indeed. Then all faded away. He awoke in the gray of dawn, to find that he had gone to sleep on Beryl's shoulder. Daylight came. Beryl presently told Keven that the train was running along a very pretty trout stream.

They had breakfast in the diner—a new experience for Beryl. She was all eyes, and so were a number of men who caught sight of her, too flushed and radiant to escape close observation. On the way back to their car a hawk-eyed young man got between Keven and Beryl. He was very polite about opening doors. At the third platform Keven heard him accost Beryl. She replied promptly enough, but Keven could not distinguish what she said. At last they reached their seats in the day coach.

"Did you see that man?" she asked. "The fool!"

"What'd he say, Beryl?"

"He said, 'Dearie, haven't I seen you before?'"

"Ahuh. And what'd you answer to that?" replied Keven with a grin.

"I said, 'You might have. I visited an insane asylum recently.'"

"I knew it—soon as we got out of the woods—men would run after you."

"Nonsense. Why should they?" rejoined Beryl.

"Beryl, you're so all-fired good-looking. Lord, but I'm proud of you!"

And so they talked and gazed out of the window at the inspiring Oregon landscape, while the train flew on. Then Portland!

At precisely five-ten the taxi driver Keven had engaged halted before a pretentious hotel. Keven hesitated. "Driver, I said a quiet, modest hotel."

"Boss, dis is modestest hotel in Portland. Sho, it's quiet, an' respectable, too."

Keven went in with the baggage, checked it, and got a couple of addresses from the clerk. Then he ran back to Beryl. They drove off. At five-twenty they walked down the steps of a municipal building with a marriage license in their possession. And before six o'clock Beryl had a shiny circlet of gold round the third finger of her left hand.

The beautiful big city, the hurrying crowds, the canyonlike walls of the streets dazed Beryl. As for Keven, the climax of that journey had dazed him. They wandered on and eventually found a modest little place to dine, where they sat in a stall, hidden on three sides. Beryl was opposite him, turning the ring on her finger.

"How easy it was!" she murmured.

"What?" he queried.

"Getting married. Did I look queer?"

"You looked like an angel. Help me pick out something to eat."

"Is there any smoked steelhead?" asked Beryl merrily.

"See here, backwoods lady. You've got to eat lobster salad, caviar, mushrooms, and—"

"But they won't have that—that stuff here," interrupted Beryl, taking the menu. Sure enough, no sign of such fashionable dishes was there. They compromised on beefsteak and potatoes, bread and butter, ice cream and cake.

Night had fallen when they went out, but the streets were brilliant with colored lights.

"I've never been to a motion picture," announced Beryl breathlessly. "Would you take me to see one Keven?"

The many street lights centered in a white-and-red sign which read *Their Wedding Night* in gorgeous letters.

"Oh," gasped Beryl, "I—I couldn't go in—here." She said that even before she saw any of the glaring posters of a sinuous siren wrapping herself round a lovesick swain.

Keven laughingly dragged her in. He found two empty seats, and when they were settled in them, he still possessed her hand. The picture was one of those fantastic and atrocious counterfeits of life, but Beryl was mystified, affronted, enchanted. Once after a climax, she whispered in Keven's ear. "It's perfectly terrible!"

Keven whispered back, "But you're a married woman now!"

After the performance, and when they had walked at least a block, Keven asked:

"Did you like it, Beryl?"

"Oh, it was wonderful."

"It's going to be great to take you places!" ejaculated Keven, squeezing

her arm. "Say, what was the name of that hotel?"

"What hotel?"

"Where we went first, and I left the baggage."

"I don't know—I didn't see any name."

"Gosh, I never looked!"

"What'll we do now?" asked Beryl, aghast.

"We sure are from Solitude. Here's a cop. I'll describe the place. He can tell us."

Eventually they reached their hotel, tired and happy, with Beryl lagging a little, dragging at his arm, mute now where for long she had babbled like one of her mountain brooks.



Next morning they went out together, into a roseate world.

Beryl went to the oculist with Keven and waited in the outer room. Keven found himself well remembered. He sat in a darkened room, facing strange instruments, through which the oculist cast a pinpoint of white light upon his injured eye. He had to try to read letters of difficult sizes. He sat with his head in a brace and looked through bits of glass slid in a frame before him. And the moment arrived when he could see as well with his defective eye as with the other.

"Your general physical tone has greatly improved," said the doctor. "Likewise your eyesight. I will give you glasses for reading and close work. The right glass will be bifocal and quite strong. The left glass will have no power. I'll have them ready for you in a few days."

Keven thanked him and rejoined Beryl. "Come. Ho, for that dentist! While my luck lasts!"

They found Dr. Ames in the same building. "Hello, Bell, how're the steel-head running?" was the genial doctor's greeting.

"Fine, Doctor. Twelve-pounders thick lately. This—this is my—my wife, Beryl."

"I'm delighted to meet you, Mrs. Bell," said the doctor. "I didn't know my Rogue River informant had a wife. I fancy it's not been for long."

"About one day," replied Beryl shyly.

"You don't say! Well! My hearty congratulations! Bell, take a seat and wait a little I'll get after you quick."

Keven had nerved himself for an ordeal, and when once in the operating chair he prepared for it.

After an examination, the dentist said: "Your mouth is in pretty fair condition. Ulcers gone. Very little stomatitis. We can go to work at once. And that's fine. I'll take a plaster impression first, before the tissue and bone become irritated. Then I'll have to burn and scrape. It'll hurt like hell."

"Go to it, Doctor. I can stand anything."

Cocaine helped some, but in spite of it Keven searched the very depths of agony. It was a wobbling, clammy-faced Keven that returned to Beryl.

"Oh, Kev, you've been hurt," she exclaimed anxiously.

"Hurt! Ump-umm! I'm only killed. Beryl, that kick from the old cannon was nothing to what this kind gentle dentist did to me."

"Mrs. Bell, it was something of an operation, I admit," said the dentist. "But it was necessary. When it's over he'll be amply repaid."

Keven and Beryl went back to their hotel and stayed in for several hours, until his pain had ceased; then they went shopping. Beryl insisted on a complete new outfit for Keven. The well-tailored gray suit and accessories would be delivered to their hotel the following day. They still had an hour to look for something for Beryl. The saleswoman brought forth gowns that dazzled Keven. But Beryl, though admitting their elegance, showed no disposition to try one of them on.

"But, darling, it's to knock 'em dead in Grant's Pass," entreated Keven.

"Honey, I—I couldn't wear a dress with no top or sleeves in it," protested Beryl.

"Sure, you could. You've got the loveliest neck and arms of any girl in the whole world. I'll be divided between pride and jealousy. Beryl, please try on that shiny gold dress. Just to let me see how you look!"

"That one! Kev, there's not enough of it to cover half of me."

"Please try it on."

The saleswoman returned with more glittering fabrics. Beryl took up the shimmering gold thing and asked to try it on. She went away with the pleased saleswoman. Keven sat down, once more aware of the deep-seated throb in his jaw. Then a vision glided into sight. Keven stared incredulously.

"Isn't she lovely, sir?" asked the saleswoman excitedly. "This gold suits her coloring."

"Kev, I tried it on—just to please you. But of course I—I couldn't take it," murmured Beryl.

"You're a queen!" he exploded.

"Do you—like me—in it?" she asked.

"Like you?" Beryl found mere words inadequate.

"Kev, would you—buy it for me, if I

would take it?" asked Beryl. "It's eighty-seven dollars. And slippers, stockings, etc., would fetch the cost to a hundred and over."

Keven never flinched. His gesture repudiated the idea of cost.

"Well, I'll think it over and call tomorrow," said Beryl to the saleswoman. "It's too late to try on another today."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

In the Flesh

EXCEPT for a few trying ing hours in the dentist's chair the next few days were nothing less than enchant-

ment for Keven Bell. He took Beryl everywhere, even to see a famed trout stream near the city. He quite forgot to be careful with money, and certainly Beryl did not help him to remember.

He stopped at the oculist's office to pick up the new glasses. Hardly taking time to thank the oculist, he rushed out to confront Beryl.

"Beryl, that blank black place is gone!" he cried gleefully.

"Oh, splendid! How nice you look!"

The dental work, too, was completed at last. The artificial jaw and teeth of gold, platinum, and porcelain were inserted and felt comfortable. Keven ran his hand round his chin. Then he looked in the mirror an assistant held before him. He could not believe his eyes.

"Fine and dandy, Doc!" he ejaculated. "You've made a new man out of me. Gosh, I couldn't thank you if I tried. Hand over your bill now, quick. I've got to rustle back to the hotel. This job will please a little lady I know."

When Keven paid the bill he had

only a few dollars left, but such was his state of elation that for the moment he did not even think of money. He rushed back to Beryl.

"It's done. I'm all through. What do you—think?" he panted, posing for her.

Beryl leaped up, her eyes glad.

"Kev! Oh, you handsome man! I—I hardly know you. To think it would make such a difference! I'm just too happy for words."

"Gosh, so'm I. But wait till I tell—"

She gave a little squeal and almost climbed on him, and kissed his chin, and the new line of his jaw, and lastly his lips in an abandon wholly unusual with her.

"There! I have been saving that," she whispered.

"Lord, but I love you, Beryl!" he cried, giving her an enormous hug. "But listen, honey. It's great for us—to mend me up this way so I'm not ashamed for anyone to see you with me. But it took all the money we had left. Except this—three dollars."

"Oh," returned Beryl, not particularly impressed.

"Darling, how'll I pay the hotel bill? Fortunately I had sense enough to buy round-trip railroad tickets. We can't go to Grant's Pass. This is a disappointment. And the peach of an outfit for you! I did so want that. Damn the luck!"

He turned away so that she would not see the tears in his eyes.

"Honey, do you feel very badly?" she asked sweetly.

"Rotten! I'd rather you had the dress. Why didn't I make you buy it? The doctor would have trusted me."

"Look on the bed," said Beryl softly.

In surprise Keven turned as bidden. The bed appeared to be loaded down with a bewildering array of finery, in

the midst of which shone the lacy golden gown he had so admired. He espied slippers and stockings to match. Then there was a blue traveling-dress, a small blue hat, and gloves and shoes. And underneath all these shone silk lingerie.

"Isn't it lovely?" she asked innocently.

"Good heavens! Beryl, you didn't go in debt for all this stuff?"

"No. I—just bought it."

"Bought it! What with?"

"Well naturally, it had to be done with money."

Keven sat down stunned. "How much did all this cost?"

"I haven't figured up yet."

"Where'd you get the money? Did your father give you more besides the wedding present, which, by the way, I spent on myself?"

"No. Dad gave me only the hundred dollars, which you had."

"Well, sweetheart, I hope you didn't rob a bank."

"I've had the money for a long time, Keven. And I reckon I'd better give you what's left." Whereupon she extracted a roll of bills from her bag and handed it to Keven. "Don't look so scared, darling. It was honestly mine, and what's mine is yours."

"Thank you, Beryl," replied Keven huskily. "Was this a—legacy?"

"Hardly," she said mysteriously. "I've saved it, a little at a time, during the four years you stayed away from me. I thought it might come in handy sometime. And it surely did. Behold my trousseau! And we're going to Grant's Pass."

"Oh, we are! Is this *all* the money you had?"

"No, I've still enough left to buy you

a rifle and the best fishing tackle to be had. I wish you'd let me surprise you with them."

Keven counted the money she had placed in his hands. Nearly five hundred dollars!

"You see, Kev dear, we don't get married often. And we need a lot of things for our cabin. I plan to buy these at Grant's Pass and have them shipped to West Fork, then packed over to Solitude."

"By gosh! . . . I'm glad—I guess—but I'm sure flabbergasted," rejoined Keven, sitting down as if his legs had become weak. Once again he glanced at the finery on the bed. "Beryl, you have excellent taste."

"I'd rather have a few really good things than a lot of shoddy stuff . . . As for the gold gown—that's for you. If only I can screw up courage to wear it! Perhaps I can."

"You bet you will. Beryl, I'll see about trains. We'll leave for Grant's Pass tonight."

"Oh, goody!" cried Beryl, clapping her hands like a child.

"It may not be so goody as I'd fondly hoped," returned Keven ponderingly. "I'd forgot about my arrest at Gold Beach."

"Arrest! I'd forgotten about that too. What was it you were arrested for?" Beryl queried, anxious dark eyes on him.

"Assault on Gus Atwell. The sheriff at Gold Beach turned out a friend of mine. He wouldn't let them take me to Grant's Pass for trial. And the case was dropped."

"You think it might come up again if we go to Grant's Pass?"

"It probably would. But I don't feel that I can let Atwell's enmity keep me away from my home town. I *am* innocent of what Atwell laid at my door.

All I did was to knock him down. I don't believe I'd care if the case did come up again."

"I wouldn't, either. But it never will, Kev, darling," she said.

"Never? How do you know?"

"Well, it never will if you take *me* to Grant's Pass."

"Of course I'll take you. That's the main reason why I want to go. But what will that have to do with the possibility of my arrest?"

"Kev, when Major Atwell sees me with you—that will be the end of his persecution of you."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Keven, almost stiffly.

"I'm pretty sure of it," she returned.

"May I ask why?"

"I know too much about Major Atwell."

"You mean the—the personal attentions he tried to force upon you, while you were at school in Roseburg?"

"No. That was nothing. To be sure he tried, but after that one time he saw me with Emily Carstone. And you bet he sneaked."

"Emily Carstone! Who's she?" exclaimed Keven.

"She was my best friend in Roseburg."

"Any relation to that—that Carstone family in Washington?"

"A first cousin. Emily visited their ranch while the army training camp was there. A year later came the horrible disgrace. Five sisters ruined! Emily's father went out there, got the family away, and sold the ranch. I know all about the affair. Emily told me. What's more, her father told Major Atwell to stay away from Roseburg or he'd shoot him. Major Atwell knows I know all this. And it strikes me the

facts might be known in Grant's Pass by this time."

"Good heavens! Beryl, why in the world didn't you tell me this long ago? We talked about Atwell."

"I hated the whole thing. I didn't want to talk about it."

"You knew—all the time you knew Gus Atwell had laid his vile doings upon me!"

"All the time I knew, Kev. Also I knew what rot it was. Truth always comes out. No man can hide his crimes forever." She turned to the articles on the bed. "I'm sorry it came up, Kev."

Pondering and bewildered, Keven left the hotel and went uptown to look up train times.

The following night late Keven and Beryl arrived in Grant's Pass. They drove to the best hotel, which was new to Keven, and there he laboriously registered as unintelligibly as possible. He had the satisfaction of seeing that neither his face nor name had been recognized. He did not fail to note that Beryl, as usual, wherever they went, was the recipient of most admiring glances.

"Beryl, nobody knew me," said Keven with satisfaction, when they were alone in the spacious pleasant room. "Gosh, that clerk rubbered at you. And the other men, too."

"I didn't notice. But if I'm ever to be noticed I want it to be in your home town."

"Noticed? Good Lord, a blind man could see you're a beauty!"

"Thank you, Kev. That is fine on my honeymoon. But I fear you're a little hipped over my good looks."

"Doggone them, I'll show them you belong to me. I intend to hang onto you, fall all over you, gaze at you like

a dying duck, hug and kiss you in public—"

"You can't scare me, Kev Bell. Go ahead. I dare you."

"It's a bargain," cried Keven.

At sunrise he was up, gazing out of the window. What a magnificent thrill to look at the playgrounds of his boyhood with a new joy, with a surety that the regret and grief and bitterness of his first homecoming after the war had gone forever.

After a while he awoke Beryl. "Wake up, angel. And put on that blue outfit. We're going to start knocking 'em dead."

"What time is it?" yawned Beryl, stretching her round arms.

"It's late. Eight o'clock. I'll wait for you in the lobby."

Downstairs Keven found a number of men in the lobby, none of whom he recognized. He lounged about, apparently with casual interest, when inside he was bursting with excitement. He walked out to the street corner and stood there marvelling. Then he returned to the lobby. Beryl would be prompt and he did not want to miss her. Presently she entered and he was hard put to it to contain himself. At Portland she had been reserved, almost shy. Here she was a bride, wholly oblivious of anyone save him.

On the way into the dining-room he whispered, "You look like a million dollars."

"If I do you're the millionaire."

All through a delightful breakfast they talked after that fashion. Then Keven said, "What'll we do now?"

"You'll go to your father at once."

"Yes, but oughtn't you come, too?"

"No. You see him first. Don't forget you said you were supposed to be dead. Kev, show me where to find your friend

Minton. I'll go in and ask to see fishing tackle. He'll not know me from Adam."

"That'd be great. Gosh, I'd like to see you."

"It'll be all the better after I work him up, so to speak. I'll say, very loftily, 'I wish to purchase some fine tackle for my husband. He is a poor fisherman, but it's my wish that he possess a splendid outfit. Have you any really good tackle? Leonard rods, you know, and English reels, lines, leaders. He doesn't care for common things.'"

Keven laughed. "It'll be immense. Minton is crazy about pretty women anyway. Then, just when he's fallen, I'll bob in and chirp: 'Howdy, Mint, old geezer?' And he'll shout, 'My Gawd—is it a ghost? By thunder, it's Kev Bell! We thought you dead!' And I'll say, 'Terribly exaggerated, Minton. I'm fine. Meet my wife.'"

"I don't know," replied Beryl dubiously. "That about his being crazy about women! Is he very bold?"

"Bold? He's the mildest and kindest man you ever met."

"Very well, then, let's go," said Beryl. "You see your dad. Then I'll meet you at Minton's. After that we'll buy our furniture."

"Okay. But see here, honey, you'll need some money to buy the tackle from Minton," rejoined Keven, his hand going to his pocket. "But I'll not give you much."

Beryl waved this offer aside. "Thanks. I've got some money left. Anyway you'd never give me enough."

"You've got some left!" he ejaculated.

"Sure."

"Beryl!"

"Kev! Come, we're wasting time."

"See here, this—this is too much," declared Keven doggedly.

"What is—my little dab of money?"

"No, not the money itself. But your having it. Beryl, I'm going to get angry presently. I'll be thinking I married you for your money."

"All because for nearly five years you had a loving, faithful, saving sweet-heart—who's now your wife. I declare, men are funny."

They were now out on the street. Keven surrendered in despair. Then he pointed out Minton's store across the street. "I'll meet you there in a half hour," he said.

He was so thoughtful that he did not look to see if he met anyone who knew him, and before he realized how far he had gone he was down the side street almost to his father's home. No one answered his knock, and the door was locked. Keven went around to the back. Then he heard hammering in the shop. Approaching, he was able to reach the open door without being seen. His father was at work on a boat.

"Hello, Dad," he shouted, stepping in. "How's tricks?"

Bell had his back to the door. He stiffened. The hammer fell. Slowly he wheeled, calling, "*Kev!*" even before he espied his visitor. "My son! My son! I never believed you dead."

The moment ensuing was more poignant than Keven had expected, and it was he who showed the most emotion.

"You're changed—well—a new man! Why, Keven, what does this mean? An' the prosperous look of you!"

"Dad, take a peer at my new jaw," interrupted Keven, drawing down his lip. "Gold and platinum—porcelain teeth! Some class, eh? And look at my bad eye. I'll bet you can't tell which was the bad one."

"My boy, I can't, indeed."

"I've gained forty-eight pounds. Can you see it on me?"

"An, dressed in the height of fashion! For heaven's sake, explain."

"It's a long story, Dad. I'll save it for some other time. Enough to say, when I was down and out I met someone who changed me, body and soul."

"A woman!" gasped Bell.

"A girl. She's the loveliest—oh, wait till you see her. I'm well! I'm happy! I'm married! I've a job!"

The older man sat down quite suddenly upon the boat he was building, overcome.

"Dad, I'll get back my good name, too," added Keven triumphantly.

"Son, you've got it back," the old man replied ringingly. "Garry Lord saw to that, God bless him!"

"Garry Lord! Dad, what're you saying? I saw Garry drown!"

"You thought so. But you didn't. Garry's alive."

"Alive!" cried Keven huskily. "Are you sure?"

"Son, he was here last night," announced the father, his tone carrying absolute conviction.

Keven sent his hat flying. "I'm—just—knocked—flat."

"Listen," said Bell; "Garry didn't drown. The skiff floated out to sea. Next day it was sighted by a woman—daughter of a fisherman named Coombs, on his way to Crescent City. They picked Garry up, took your net an' let the skiff go. Garry had a bad knock on his head, but he recovered. He married the young woman, Mary Coombs. But that was afterward. As Garry told it he knew you were dead, murdered by a fisherman named Mulligan. Meanwhile, Mulligan's body was found, with your knife sticking in his throat. Garry knew you had stabbed Mulligan in that fight."

"Atwell went to Gold Beach—openly

accused you of murder an' sought to lay the stealin' of fish upon you. After a time Garry got proof of where that net came from an' who sold it to Mulligan. He even got proof about the eight-inch mesh at the top of the net, which Mulligan had added to it. Garry went back to Gold Beach an' stole another such net. He laid a trap for those crooked market fishermen. He had that Gold Beach sheriff hide on shore an' watch an' listen. Garry led the fishermen ashore, where, in the midst of the fight, the sheriff pounced on them. One of them was Mulligan's pardner. The sheriff arrested him, made him confess to crooked netting."

"Well, Garry an' the sheriff came here to Grant's Pass an' laid the facts before Judge Parsons an' the new chief of police. Garry told his story. It was believed. It went all over town. It cleared your name an' it cast a dark shadow on that of the man who has hounded you. Kev, Atwell is no longer associated with Brandeth—nor engaged to Rosamond."

"The world is coming to an end!" raved Keven, pacing the shop. "Where is Garry—where can I find him?"

"He runs a little fish market here, three days a week an' another three days in Crescent City. Coombs supplies the fish, Garry sells them. They're doin' well. He'll be at his place on Thursday, this week."

Keven suddenly remembered Beryl. "Dad, I gotta beat it. I'll see you again today. I'll fetch Beryl around."

By the time he arrived at Minton's store he had gained some semblance of outward composure. Keven peeped in before entering. Beryl stood in the center of the store, whipping a trout rod with no uncertain hand. Minton

was certainly fascinated by this new and lovely customer.

"This rod is no good," Beryl was saying. "It's too pudgy. My husband—"

"Pardon, lady," replied Minton, "that rod is good. It's a Leonard. There's no better made."

"I like the Grangers better," replied Beryl, laying the rod on the counter, where a pile of disordered tackle gave evidence of the condition of Minton's mind. "I'm sorry you have only two. They'll last my husband about two days."

"What kind of a—er—fisherman is he?" asked the dealer. "Is he an expert?"

"He thinks he is. But I can beat him. Of course I know the river."

"What river, Madam, may I ask?"

"The Rogue."

"You know the Rogue?" queried Minton, beaming.

"I was born on it. I know every stone from Winkle Bar to Illahe."

Keven thought it was about time to enter.

"Hey, Mint, old boy, how are you?" he yelled happily.

Minton turned pale. His eyes popped out. His jaw dropped.

"My God! Who're you?"

"Well, I like that! Don't know me! My feelings are hurt."

"It can't be—Kev Bell."

"Why can't it, I'd like to know?"

"But—he's dead."

"Dead nothing. Do I look dead?" retorted Keven.

Minton whooped and knocked everything off the counter getting at Keven.

"You ole fishin' son of a gun! Come back to life! Kev, I never was so glad in my born days. And just look at you!"

"Well, I reckon I'll have to forgive you, since you are so glad," replied

Keven, touched at the warmth of Minton's welcome.

Then the tackle dealer remembered his waiting customer, who stood there, far from calm, if he had not been too excited to notice.

"Excuse me, Madam," he apologized. "This gentleman is an old friend. He was reported dead. Naturally I was somewhat upset to have him drop out of the clouds. Now, if you please, we'll get back to—"

"Hey, stop flirting with my wife," bellowed Keven fiercely.

Minton halted as if he had been lassoed. He was thunderstruck.

"Oh, Kev," murmured Beryl.

Keven laughed till his face was convulsed. When he recovered he espied Minton leaning against the counter for support.

"Beryl, this is my good friend, Minton, whom you have heard me speak of often. Mint, old top, meet my wife."

"I'm very happy to meet you, Mr. Minton," replied Beryl.

"Wife—husband! Say, you put up a job on me," burst out Minton. "Of all the surprises! Mrs. Bell, I am delighted to make your acquaintance. Kev, you old wizard, you're about the luckiest man on earth. How'd you do it? You got chased out of Grant's Pass under a cloud. You get pinched at Gold Beach. Then you're drowned. Then your home town clears your reputation. Now you bob up well, handsome, prosperous-looking, with a queen for a wife!"

"Gosh, it is a fairy story, Mint," declared Keven. "But no wonder. Look at my fairy!"

"I've been looking."

Between Minton and Keven they gave Beryl a very flattering if embarrassing few moments. Then Keven remembered his great news.

"Oh, I almost forgot. Beryl, I've got the most wonderful news. Dad is well and fine. And listen to this. Garry Lord is alive! Some girl saved his life. He married her. If that doesn't beat me! Beryl, Dad says Garry cleared my name here in Grant's Pass."

"Bless him!" exclaimed Beryl.

"Mint, has Dad got that straight?" went on Keven anxiously.

"You just bet he has," declared Minton emphatically. "It's late in the day, Kev, but the old town has made amends."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Return to Solitude

KEVEN and Beryl spent most of the rest of that day in the stores of Grant's Pass. Beryl did the buying, while Keven accompanied her, a silent partner. If she had wanted to purchase the moon he would have made no objection and would have believed in her ability to get it. She bought furniture, utensils, and other household articles, a host of little things to make a cabin comfortable, and groceries, canned fruit, and vegetables. Then she spent as much time in a bookstore as she had at Minton's, and considerably more money. But at last she turned to Keven with a relieved and happy smile.

"Kev, now I *am* broke. But oh, wasn't it fun? I've had this in mind for years. Won't we have a dandy cabin? Won't we have a happy time this winter?"

"Well, Beryl, if we don't it'll not be for lack of work on my part, and prayers, and devotion to you," he said fervently.

"I'll have it all shipped to West Fork at once, so it'll be ready to pack when we get there. I'd say about ten pack horses, Kev. Won't Dad whoop when he sees them bobbing down the trail?"

"Dad won't be the only one who'll whoop."

"I'm sure we've forgotten something—oh, yes, your rifle."

"So we have. I'll need that. And some shells. A pair of heavy boots—raincoat. Rubber boots, too, and gloves. Beryl, you've made me careless with money. Gosh, when I think—"

"Don't think," she interrupted sweetly. "You run along. I'll leave instructions here about packing and shipping our goods. Then I'll go back to the hotel."

Keven hurried back down Main Street towards Minton's. It was late in the afternoon, with the weather perfect. The sidewalks were thronged. Keven expected to meet someone he knew, but he did not. He noted, however, that he was observed by many people, quite curiously, it seemed. He was glad to escape into Minton's store.

"Say, Mint, I forgot a rifle, ammunition, gloves, boots, and what not," he announced gaily.

"Suppose I just sell you the store," replied his friend beamingly.

"Doggone if you oughtn't. Isn't Beryl a wonder?"

"Kev, she surely is, and she is shrewd, too. She's a good sport, but don't you get an idea anybody can trim her."

While they were selecting Keven's concluding purchases the telephone rang. Minton answered the call: "Hello . . . Who? . . . Yes, he's here."

He returned to Keven with a bright face. "Call for you, Kev. That's the tenth person who's rung me up to ask

if you were really alive and in town. Men have run in here, too, asking the same. The news of your return has spread like wildfire."

"Call for me? Wonder who," returned Keven, and walking across the store he took up the receiver and said, "Hello."

"Is this Mr. Keven Bell?" asked a woman's voice, rather low.

"Yes, I'm Mr. Bell. Who is this calling?"

"Kev—don't you—know my voice?" came the query.

A queer shock ran through Keven.

"No, I'm sorry, I don't," he replied hesitatingly. "Still your voice seems familiar."

"Oh, it should be—you fickle soldier. Guess."

"I—I'm not good at guessing."

"*Rosamond!*"

Keven nearly dropped the receiver. He looked up wildly, to see Minton waving his hands in the most ridiculous manner.

"*Rosamond!* Not Rosamond Brandeth?" he ejaculated weakly.

"Yes, indeed it is. Oh, Kev, I'm half crazy. I was in a car just a few minutes ago—when I saw you. I nearly fainted. You know—don't you? We thought you dead. You don't know, of course, that that nearly broke my heart. Kev, I—I made a mistake. I found it out—only too late, I thought. But surely it isn't, now you've come to life. But heavens, I can't go on like this over the phone. I must see you—to tell you everything. May I run down there in my car and pick you up?"

"Aw—I—we—thanks awfully, Rosamond," floundered Keven. "But I was just leaving. I'm in a rush. Tomorrow maybe—"

"Oh, so! I get you, Keven. In a rush! Didn't I see you with a girl?"

"I surely walked down the street with one. You might have seen me."

"Same old devil with the girls, eh?"

"Not exactly."

"Don't try to kid me. Who was she?"

"Which one do you mean?" countered Keven. "Was it the—the blonde?"

"No. She was dark. And jealous as I am, I've got to hand the laurel to her."

"Thank you."

"Well, you matched her for looks, if you ask me. Kev, where can I see you, quick? I'll run down to the hotel. Don't try to stop me, Kev Bell. So long."

Keven fell away from the telephone, to gaze in consternation at the grinning Minton.

"Rosamond Brandeth! What do you know about that?"

"It's great. It tickles me pink."

"But it doesn't tickle me. It scares me limp. Mint, she wants to make up with me."

"Let her want. It'll do her good. But I'm bound to tell you she gave Atwell the gate last spring, and she's running pretty decent—for her."

"My Lord! If she happened to meet Beryl! She'd cook my goose."

"Not with that little lady, I'll gamble. Buck up, Kev. Hang round here with me till after six. That'll dodge her. Of course you'll run into her while you're in town. You ought to be glad to. And make a point of having Beryl with you. Now let's get back to guns and things. I advise a 30 Gov't 1906 Winchester for that mountain country. You want a high-power rifle, with flat trajectory and long range. The 30 takes several grades of shells."

Keven soon recovered his equilibrium and his gay spirits. He spent an hour with Minton and, finally making his choice, he paid the bill and asked that the articles be sent to the hotel.

Whereupon he left, promising to see Minton on the morrow. Among the cars parked in front of the hotel was a beautiful little roadster of a make unknown to Keven. As he came abreast of it a smartly dressed young woman came out of the lobby. In one flash Keven recognized Rosamond, the same attractive dashing creature she had always been.

He halted to meet her, hat in hand. "How do you do, Rosamond?" he said, bowing, and he met the hand she extended.

"Well, Kev Bell! Hello, you lost soldier," she replied, and drew him to the edge of the pavement where the bright car was parked. There she looked reproachfully at him. "I went into the lobby here and asked for Keven Bell. They sent down your wife. Why didn't you tell me you were married and not let me make a damn fool of myself?"

"You didn't give me a chance," protested Keven, deeply embarrassed.

"Bunk! You didn't have the nerve," she returned scornfully. "But I can take my medicine. Serves me right. I didn't appreciate you when I had you. She's a peach, Kev. I wish you joy."

She shut the door and drove away, leaving Keven standing there, bare-headed and stricken. Remembering Beryl, he ran into the hotel and up the stairs. He found Beryl lying across the bed, face down. A moment he stood conscience-stricken. Then he turned the key in the lock.

"Beryl," he called, bending over the bed. She was not weeping. Her body appeared stiff. He shook her, then lifted her to a sitting position. Her face was white, her eyes, blue-black blazing orbs.

"Flirt! Liar! Get out!" she cried, with indescribable bitterness.

"Beryl, what did she tell you?" he asked.

"She asked when I had met you," replied Beryl in a low voice. "I told her. Then she informed me you made love to her—engaged yourself to marry her—after you left me at Solitude. I told her she lied. She laughed in my face—oh, God, she could afford to laugh! Keven, you are free to go back to her. She wants you. I felt it. And I—I don't."

"Darling, don't—"

"Is it true?"

"Is what true?"

"That you—you made up to her after the week you spent with me—four years and more ago—at Solitude?"

"Beryl, to my shame it is true," he replied hurriedly. "I—"

"Then go. I hate you!"

"But listen. Surely you will hear my excuse—if it be one. I fished with you at Solitude that week long ago—played with you—made love to you—oh, I took liberties with you. And then like the wild, careless, crazy boy I was I rode away and forgot you. I became infatuated with Rosamond Brandeth. In the excitement of leaving to go to training camp, I—I proposed to her. And she accepted me. Then I went away. As I might have expected—with her, out of sight, out of mind. She never wrote. Then I was injured. Two years I spent in hospitals. Then I was mustered out—sent home—you know the rest. I became an outcast here in my home town. I assaulted Atwell and fled. You remember when I passed through Solitude on my way to Gold Beach."

"Oh, I do remember!" she moaned. "But I didn't know *why* you would not stop." Her hands clung to his.

"There I went from—bad to worse," continued Keven shudderingly, yet he

gathered hope with the sense of his power over her. "You know how Garry and I were nagged and cheated, our labor made useless. Atwell was back of that. Then came the night when I killed Mulligan and thought Garry was lost. I fled up the river, my one resolve to shoot Atwell before they caught me. *You met me at Solitude. You stopped me there. You saved me—but you know it all. Memory slowly came back—and hope and faith and health. Love, too, Beryl.*

"I had never loved Rosamond Brandeth. I was only a boy. It was nothing compared to my love for you. Once or twice, late in the summer I felt that I should have told you. But I didn't. I just didn't. It was cowardly of me. But I hated to hurt you. That's all, Beryl. You and Solitude saved me—changed me. I couldn't go on without you."

He ended brokenly, beseechingly. Beryl loosened his hold of her hands. Suddenly she drew his head to her breast.

"I believe you, Kev, I forgive," she sobbed. "But, oh, how could you do it!"

Next morning they sought out Garry Lord. They had located his shop, a stall-like little compartment between two stores just off the main street. They were waiting for Garry to open up, watching from a doorway. Promptly at eight o'clock an ice wagon stopped before the place and unloaded ice on the sidewalk. Soon after that, the sturdy market fisherman appeared, ice tongs in his hand, and dragged in the cakes of ice.

"Now, Beryl," said Keven eagerly, "you go first. Walk right in on Garry. Tell him you want to buy some steelhead. Say your husband loves steelhead and won't eat anything else in

the fish line. After he wraps up the steelhead you tell him you haven't any money and ask him to trust you. Then I'll amble in."

Keven went down the opposite side of the narrow street and watched Beryl enter the store to accost Garry. Then Keven crossed the street. When he entered the open door Garry was behind the counter, his weather-beaten face shining, and he was wrapping up fish.

"I had a pard once who loved steelhead like this husband of yours," Garry was saying. "I'm sorry he's hard up. But you shore don't look it. All the same, lady, I'd trust *you* for anythin'."

"Oh, thank you, so much," murmured Beryl. "I knew you were a gentleman and a good sport."

"You did? How'd you know that?"

"I had only to see you once."

Garry fell. He looked it. Blushing like a girl, he replied, "Lady, I—I'm a married man—but—"

Just then Keven picked up a small trout from the window shelf and threw it at Garry with a whoop. Garry looked up to see the missile at the same instant he saw Keven.

Bam! The fish took him squarely in the middle. Garry doubled up and froze in that position.

"Say, you upriver salmon ketcher," yelled Keven, "are you trying to make a date with my girl?"

Beryl trilled out her merry laugh. But for Garry the situation held no humor.

"*My—Gawd!* Who're you?" he gasped, shaking like a leaf. His dark rugged countenance turned a greenish white.

The fun of it for Keven suddenly ceased. The agony of appeal in Garry's faithful blue eyes was too much to bear.

"Pard. Don't—you know me?" he asked huskily.

Garry began to jump and yell like a maniac. "Mary! Mary! I got 'em again. I knowed I laid off the bottle too quick. Mary!"

A door at the back of the shop quickly opened to disclose a buxom young woman, whose ruddy pleasant face wore a look of concern.

"What ails you, man?" she demanded severely.

"I swear I ain't had nothin', sweetie," replied Garry, "but I either got 'em again or the dead has come to life. Look at that feller. Is he there, Mary, or am I seein' things?"

Keven stepped forward. "Garry, old pard, it is Kev. Come back to life in more ways than one. And this is Beryl, my wife."

Then for Keven, and surely for the two watching women, there dawned the realization that for some of the grief and longing in life there was recompense.



On the long ride over the mountain ridges, above the flaming canyons, Keven and Beryl lived over their three wonderful days in Grant's Pass. Dreams had come true. Hopes that had seemed vain were fulfilled. They hardly exchanged a word until they came abruptly out of the forest, upon the open mountainside above Winkle Bar.

In the sunset flush of gold and red the shining, singing river was revealed, as a promise fulfilled, as a goal reached. They sat long on their horses watch-

ing, listening, while the sun sank, before they started down the trail.

Darkness overtook them when they were about abreast of Missouri Bar. By the time they reached Mule Creek Canyon they were talked out. Thereafter they rode on in blissful silence, always aware of their river.

It was eleven o'clock when they arrived at Solitude. Old Moze gave tongue, and his deep rolling bay awoke the echoes of the steep slopes. The other hounds chimed in.

"Hyar, you prodigals," called Aard from his window. "All well with you?"

"All well, Daddy," sang Beryl in tired happy tones. "Ten pack mules on the trail, due tomorrow."

"All well, indeed," rang out Keven hoarsely.

They slept in Keven's cabin. When Keven awoke the sun was up, and a golden-purple glory poured in door windows. Beryl lay asleep, her profile and black hair outlined against the pillow. Keven hovered over her, possessed of a longing to kiss her awake. But he tiptoed out, to encounter Aard in the yard.

"Wal, bless my stars, son! You look made over new. Honeymoons must agree with you."

"My Lord, but it's been great," exclaimed Keven. "But I'll let Beryl have the joy of telling you. Now Aard, it's enough for me to say I've thanked God a thousand times for guiding me to Beryl and you. Give me work. I owe Beryl a lot of money. It doesn't matter how long it takes to pay her back. But I must get on the job. Only she won't let me help you trap fur. I'm sorry, but I can't go against her wishes."

"I reckoned she wouldn't. Wal, it ain't so important. Any hurry about this hyar job?"

"Hurry? I guess yes. Right now I want it settled. What with your accumulating stock and the growing orchards there's plenty of work. Then I'll branch out for myself, some way or other."

"Wal, son, I'm glad you're so keen about it," replied Aard, his piercing eyes on Keven. "I've a job you haven't reckoned on. Come along."

Wonderingly Keven followed the trapper out of the yard, past the first orchard, and up the creek trail to the heavily wooded bench. Aard crossed the gully on the boulders, and taking to a fallen fir tree he walked its long length, presently to step down into another trail, well defined and deep. It led to a shallow gully, out of which a tiny brook ran to leap down the mountainside. The timber was heavy here, forming thick shade. They proceeded up the brook, soon to come to banks of reddish-yellow earth, where there were unmistakable evidences of placer mining. Keven's mind began to be illumined.

"Son, this claim pays about five dollars a day, workin' six hours," said Aard quietly. "I never work it in summer, because packers or prospectors ridin' the trail would see muddy water an' get curious. But it's safe from November till April."

Keven had no voice to answer. But he was thinking this must solve the mystery of the Aards. Presently Aard drew some brush carefully from in front of a hole in the slope of the ridge above the brook. It was a tunnel—a shaft like hundreds he had seen up and down the river.

"This is another claim of mine," went on Aard. "I've only dug in about sixty feet. Average cleanup a day from ten to fifteen dollars. I'm bound to admit

it gets a little richer the farther I go in. There's a chance of runnin' into a pocket of gold. In which case—wal, enough said. But there's moderate work hyar for years. Good wages, an' shore the chance of a strike. Though I never gamble on that."

Keven found it convenient to sit down on a stone. His legs wobbled and there was a riot in his breast.

"Aard—your trapping is only a blind?" he queried.

"Sure is. But I like the woods. When I was a boy, huntin' an' trappin' got into me I find it advisable to keep them up. Years ago, as you know, there was a big company placer-minin' across the river. They gave this place the name Solitude. But that company was crooked. Prospectors have dug around hyar some since, mostly pannin' down by the river. They never struck anythin' good. So I've had this all to myself. An' I've worked to keep it so. Shore these claims are on my land. I proved up on this land years ago an' someday will get my patent from the government. So we're safe. But, son, we don't want the peace of Solitude broken."

"No—indeed," said Keven thickly.

"So, son, this is your job, an' I reckon you needn't worry none about your debt to Beryl."

"Oh, that girl! She drove me near crazy. Every little while, when I was distracted about our expenses, our extravagances, she'd laugh and dig up more money. If only she had told me!"

"Well, she had her way. An' that was to surprise you. Now, Kev, you're in the family. Hyar's your job. But don't get gold-mad an' spoil it. Don't work too much. Wintertime is enough, when the rain an' snow fall to keep the ground wet. Our wants are reasonable. Shore you'll need to take Beryl out a

month or so every year. I'm right glad you've come back to us, for my sake same as hers."

Keven was deeply moved. "Aard, what can I say—what can I *do*?" he queried.

"Wal, you needn't say nothin'," returned the trapper. "An' shore you see what there is to do. Make my lass happy. I know you can. I've seen that ever since you got well. Before, I had my doubts. Beryl is like her mother. Just love her, Kev. That's all. An' Solitude will be—wal, Solitude for many years to come."

They worked their way back to the creek trail and began the descent. Keven halted at the open spots to look. Indian summer had fallen on the valley. He felt that he might be seeing it through magnified and glory-hued glasses. But the colors were really there. Black sheered up the dense slopes of firs, without a break, clear to the blue sky. But that was straight across the valley to the vast mountain wall. On Keven's side it was a broken slope, not at all forbidding. And here Indian summer reigned.

No eye could take in all that color without being blinded to actualities. But by limiting his sight to this slope or that bench, to canyon and ridge and ravine, to open oak knolls and stretches of madroña, to any of a thousand vistas, Keven made some approach to appreciation of the glory of Solitude. He seemed surrounded by bright areas. Gold now encroached upon the green, and both were slashed by red, by cerise, by flame, by magenta, by scarlet. Winding bands of yellow bordered the river, their continuity broken by gray amber-mossed, brown-ferned, red-vined rocks. A drowsy warm sultry air mantled the valley, and far up, near the

bend, the smoky haze began, deepening to purple.

Once more in the enclosure Keven espied Beryl sitting on the porch of his cabin, her dark head bent. He saw the glint of a fishing rod.

Aard drew Keven into his living-room and directed his attention to a rude bookcase built along one of the logs.

"See anythin' queer?" he asked.

"No," replied Keven wonderingly.

Aard shoved the books to one end of the shelf. This disclosed a section of log, apparently identical with the other timbers of the cabin. But Aard inserted his finger in a knothole and shoved aside a cunningly concealed slide. The log was partly hollow. Inside reposed a number of gray buckskin bags, neatly tied and tagged, and significantly bulging. Aard removed one.

"Heft it," he directed Keven.

Keven's unprepared hand sagged markedly.

"Gold!" he whispered.

"Wal, it ain't anythin' else. Son, I reckon we can keep the wolf away from the door. Now go out an' fetch Beryl in to breakfast."

Keven slowly crossed the yard like a man in a trance. He approached Beryl, gazed down upon her. Old brown blouse, overalls, heavy shoes, all the worse for water and wear, signified her intentions this first morning at home after her honeymoon. Her lap was full of fishing tackle, comprising envelopes full of flies, packets of leaders, reels and lines—a showy assortment. She was examining a shiny fly rod, which she had not yet jointed. These articles were part of the precious pack she would not trust to the mule drivers they had engaged at West Fork.

"Morning, old dear. Gee, you look funny," she said brightly.

"So I've married an heiress?" he asked in awed accents, putting his hands in his pockets to keep them off her.

"So Dad's told you? Kev, I'm afraid you *have* married an heiress—in a small way. Aren't you glad?" She seemed somewhat concerned about this amazing circumstance, though there shone a twinkle in her eyes.

"No gold could make you more precious, Beryl. I'm so happy that—that—"

"Oh, so am I. Isn't it lovely to be home again? Indian summer at Solitude! And I've come back your wife! Dear God, I don't know why I deserve to be so happy."

Keven knew, but he could not find words to express his knowledge.

"Hey, you turtledoves," called Aard. "Come to breakfast."

"Come down to the river and watch me try out my new rod," invited Beryl afterward.

On the way down the trail she turned to Keven with soft dark eyes.

"I'm sorry for Rosamond Brandeth. She found out too late that she loved you best."

"Don't waste your pity, Beryl."

"Well, if you made love to her like you did to me—and villain that you were, you must have!—I don't see how she could *ever* get over it."

"Don't block the trail," retorted Keven, and as Beryl continued to walk backwards, suddenly he seized her in his arms and carried her.

He expected a protest, not to say more. But she liked it. She nestled her head against his shoulder.

"Kev, darling, do you know—when you first came back to Solitude and

for a long time after—you couldn't have packed me like this?"

"No, indeed. But it's easy now."

"I'm a husky piece. One hundred and twenty-eight!"

"You're a feather. Beryl, you haven't kissed me yet this morning."

She rectified that neglect. And her kiss brought on the impending deluge of Keven's bursting love and pride. As always with Beryl, his surrender to emotion induced a corresponding lapse in her.

"Oh—honey—am I riding or flying?" she murmured, at last breaking away and slipping down. "Listen, Kev, once for all," she went on, very sweet and grave. "It's heavenly for me to hear you rave like that, but I'm no goddess, no noble creature, no angel. I'm just ordinary Beryl Aard, lovesick for you. Please don't spoil me."

"Gosh, there comes the pack train," ejaculated Keven, gazing up the trail. "I'll bet those half-breed drivers saw us. They have eyes like hawks."

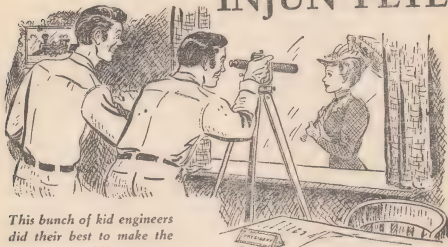
"What do we care? Say, they sure rustled along. We'll have to go back and unpack all that stuff. Such fun! But I've time to make a few casts. You stay here, you critical, masterful fisherman. My fisherman, whom I've promised to love, honor, and *obey* all my life. Oh, dear!"

Soon Beryl stood back from the edge of the bar, casting down alongshore with her inimitable grace. She forgot the arrival of the pack train. She no longer heard the bells on the mules. She grew oblivious of Keven. He, too, fell under the spell. And the river glided on in an endless solitude, its eternal song, low and musical, near at hand, droning sweet melody from the rapid at the bend, and filling the distant drowsy air with its soft thunder.

THE END

The Hanging of

INJUN PETE



This bunch of kid engineers did their best to make the West really wild!

By T. J. KERTTULA and D. L. McDONALD

IT happened sixty-odd years ago in a little Montana town along that ribbon of steel later glamorized as "the Main Street of the West." They are old men now, those still living who took part, and for some reason they seem determined that the details of the incident shall die with them. Perhaps it is just the *esprit de corps* of the engineers, but ask one of them about the hanging of Injun Pete and he will hedge and say, "Well, perhaps it wasn't quite that way!" But still the story will not die.

It seems that one spring morning some time around 1884 or '85 railroad officials at one of the Western division points woke up to find they had, through the blunder of someone along the line, acquired one superfluous corps of engineers. "Those damn surveyors," the general manager called

them. Whatever the G.M.'s personal opinion, it was painfully apparent to everyone, even the office boys, that this group was unique. Their lack of experience was second only to their general lack of whiskers. Since this was obviously their first job, and some of them were undoubtedly sons or grandsons of someone higher up—they must have been!—no one had the heart to fire them.

So the eight or ten kid surveyors hung hopefully around the round-house, awaiting orders to go survey something—anything. While they cooled their heels, they occasionally set up transits in the president's private office (everyone figured one of them must be close kin to him) and happily surveyed whatever girls happened to wander into view.

Now, despite all Wild West tales to the contrary, there wasn't a more staid and conventional spot on the globe than a small Western city in the '80s. When the rumors of these "surveyings" began to circulate there descended upon the unsuspecting president a delegation of the town's clubwomen, mammas of the girls who'd been surveyed. The poor man, outnumbered and driven into a corner, angrily branded the rumors as malicious lies and in the same breath promised it would happen no more.

The hot spud resulting from the invasion of wives of potential shippers rolled from office to office, in search of someone responsible for the kid engineers. Down through all the maze of positions created especially for deserving relatives of the directors it traveled, and landed—still smoking—back on the general manager's desk. With the hot breath of the president on his neck, the G.M. acted. Collaring the first relative to show himself, he roared:

"Haul that damn chain gang out west and dump 'em in some Godforsaken spot where there's nothing but sage brush and jack rabbits. Mind you, not even a squaw! Tell them to take a bearing on the north star and start surveying a line clear to Fanalulu.

"Now git!"

With commendable speed, the relative "got." Rounding up the kids, he broke the news to them. They hailed it with wild enthusiasm, although none of them had ever heard of Fanalulu. For that matter, neither had the G.M.'s relative.

At the appointed time they assembled at the station, bogged down with every conceivable type of apparatus which might prove useful in the forthcoming conquest of the West.

They spent their time en route glean-ing much valuable information, and a brand-new vocabulary, from the Wild West "shockers" they'd brought along. They searched the landscape diligently for signs of Indians, but all they saw was an occasional prairie dog and a few mangy coyotes.

After a long tedious ride they were unceremoniously dumped on the station platform of this little town at the then end of a branch line. Bewildered, they stared first at the short row of false-fronts facing the tracks, then at the mammoth shipping-pens on the other side, and finally, with regret, at the train receding into the distance. As it disappeared beyond the horizon they picked up their baggage and headed for the false-front marked *Hotel*.

In single file they followed the leader from the scorching sunlight of the street into the sultry twilight of the lobby. A step over the threshold, and the first engineer recoiled, sending the whole line stumbling back in confusion.

"Look, an Indian," he whispered, pointing with his suitcase. Acutely conscious of their scalps, the others crowded forward to look.

The man clad in moccasins, tattered dirty jeans, and an Army shirt two sizes too big for him was indubitably an Indian, though perhaps less picturesque than they'd expected. He lay asleep against the wall, his chin slumped on his chest. Slowly the heavy eyelids opened and small black eyes surveyed them dully.

"Ugh, palefaces," he greeted, adding hopefully, "Whisky?"

The suggestion was lost on the engineers as they gingerly stepped over his protruding legs and made their

way to the desk. Injun Pete closed his eyes and lapsed again into coma.

An hour later the boys tumbled down the steep stairs and tramped across the lobby to the bar. Hesitantly they lined up alongside the plank bar as the proprietor scurried out from behind the desk and became bartender.

"What'll it be, gentlemen?" he asked.

They named their poison with names gleaned from their recent reading: Snake Oil, Tarantula Juice, Forty Rod, and Tanglefoot. The bartender lifted a quizzical eyebrow, slid glasses along the bar, and filled them all with a dark murky liquid from an unlabeled bottle.

The figure of Injun Pete, now half-upright in the doorway, posed a nice question of etiquette. According to the Wild West lore they'd just absorbed, one did not drink with an Indian. On the other hand, if they passed him up wouldn't he be tempted to lift their scalps some dark night in reprisal? They motioned Pete to the bar.

Spluttering and coughing, they downed the load, striving to look as nonchalant as old hands used to drinking diluted tar. Then one of the boys slouched against the bar and drawled, "Say, podner, be there a wickiup hereabouts named Fanalulu?"

The bartender blinked a couple of times and then, shedding four years of Yale, took on local color. "Wal, now, I reckon as how there be. You boys figgerin' to paint her red, or somethin'?"

"Nope. We wuz sent to survey a railroad from here to Fanalulu."

The bartender was momentarily nonplussed. To gain time, he filled their glasses once more. This seemed an opportunity to get rid of that haunt of desolation he called his "ranch," if he could manipulate events a bit. That land speculator from St. Louis would

be around 'most any time now, and if he could be shown a ranch right alongside a new branch line—? The bartender tilted the unlabeled bottle once more.

Of course there wasn't really any such town as Fanalulu. The name was started by the hardbitten old rooster who owned the little Jawbone line. At an Eastern railroad men's convention he'd gotten tired of being asked about the towns along his private one-horse line. Not wanting to admit there were nothing but prairie-dog towns, he invented a few on the spur of the minute. The biggest of them all, he claimed, was Fanalulu, and a rider could see its lights for a hundred miles at night. When the G. M. told the kid engineers to go survey a line clear to Fanalulu he was, in a manner of speaking, using a euphemism for a much warmer place.

Later the bartender led them out on the sidewalk and pointed to a gap in the distant hills—which happened to be directly behind his ranch.

"Knowin' this country like I do," he told them, "I'd say the line will hook onto the stockyards spur and go through that gap. I don't know where-all it will go after that, but you wait an' see if I ain't right."

He then dismissed them with a cheerful, "Suppertime, boys. You go wash up. I gotta run over to the depot for a minute."

The station agent listened attentively to the hotel man's proposition. Then he said, "Never mind about work orders for that gang. I'll see they're kept out of trouble and given a little practice by sending them out to survey an extension onto the stockyard spur. To a stranger it'll look like the branch line is heading for the Gap. You just leave it to me; I'll have them surveyin' in the right direction when that land

buyer comes along. *If there's a big enough cut in it for me.*" The two men shook hands on it.

Hot, tedious days dragged by as the engineers awaited orders, and the bartender word of the land speculator from St. Louis. There was little for the surveyors to do but loaf, reread their Wild West literature, and write letters. Letter writing soon became the favorite pastime, and daily story conferences were held. Suitable subjects were thoroughly discussed and the complete letters read aloud to prevent contradictions.

Shortly thereafter the girls they had so recently been surveying from the president's office were swamped with letters. It began innocently enough with the first letters confined solely to descriptions of the country and the lonely life of men banished to the plains.

As the boys warmed up to the task the letters began to take on an alarming note. The survey was creeping forward against almost insurmountable opposition. Sitting Bull, Chief Joseph, and others were banding together to prevent further encroachment of the Iron Horse on buffalo range. Every foot of the way was marked with blood—blood of the Indians and of the engineers. While half the party worked the other half fought off repeated attacks.

Daily the casualty lists grew, and the hotel was now a hospital. Bill had a bullet in his leg, Jim an arrow in his shoulder, Mike's scalp had been almost ripped off, and the others were wounded in lesser degrees. Still each morning a smaller but undaunted crew took up the task. The survey, like the mails, must go through!

The girls reacted much as the engineers had hoped, but far beyond their

expectations. Comparing letters, they could find no glaring discrepancies, but a study of the "casualty lists" convinced them that, unless something was done, there would be no more engineers. Taking a leaf from their mammas' book, they descended *en masse* on the general manager's office.

The G. M. goggled at the letters. "Bunk, pure unadulterated bunk," he snorted. "There isn't an Indian within a hundred and fifty miles of that station. Make them prove it! If they can, I'll fire a bunch of my wife's relatives and give those kids jobs right in this office." He scowled up into their pretty, puzzled faces. "Make them *prove* it," he snarled. "And now, git!"

The engineers were dismayed by the new tone of the letters they received. No matter how they read them, the letters were beginning to contain more than a hint of disbelief. More and more often the word "proof" kept cropping up.

They went into a conference which lasted far into the night. Nothing much came of it except the agreement that some sort of proof had to be produced or there would be no hero's welcome for them on their return.

Early next morning they set out to canvas the town for Indian relics which might do. Nothing came of that either, for the only thing they could find was a moth-eaten old scalp which even an all-night soaking would not freshen up enough to pass for one newly jerked from a warrior's head. Dejectedly they trooped to lunch and told their good friend, the hotel man, their troubles.

"Boys," he said, "if what you want is proof, I've got an idea. The feller up at the depot has one of them new-fangled picture-takin' machines. If you

could get him to take pictures of you workin' and you was to use Pete for an Injun attackin' you, you could make it all proper."

They hailed the suggestion with enthusiasm and spent the rest of the day discussing its possibilities. After the station agent had agreed to do his part, for a price, they set about coaxing Pete to ride to the reservation for an Indian costume. Pete was uncompromisingly reluctant to undertake anything as energetic as a hundred-mile ride, but by loading him up with whisky and promising him much more on his return they finally got him started.

By the time Pete returned everything was in readiness. Behind the hotel barn, with the empty prairie for backdrop, they set up their equipment. Most of the time the camera would be in the shade while the actors posed in the sunlight; besides, it was close enough to the depot so the agent could sneak out now and then to snap a few pictures.

Here, day after day, Pete, in his borrowed war bonnet and stripped of all the clothes the boys dared to take off, emulated his illustrious ancestors on the hotel's ancient swaybacked buggy horse. Frequently, on signal from the bartender, he chose some crucial moment to stage a sitdown strike and demand more whisky.

The pictures turned out disappointingly flat and indistinct, but that, they hoped, would serve to hide the fact they were posed. As fast as the station agent could finish up a batch a steady stream of "proof" began to flow back to civilization.

"Boys," one of them suggested at the end of a long story conference, "we've got to wind this up somehow before the girls start asking us why we're only

fighting one Indian. Let's take one more round and call it quits. What'll we try this last time?"

"Well," someone suggested, "why don't we win this war and hang Pete to prove we won it?" It seemed like a fine idea.

Early next morning the engineers started to coax Pete to the cottonwood grove along the river. In spite of hours of explaining the night before, Pete still seemed reluctant. So they brought along two jugs of whisky and allowed him to heft and smell them, but not to sample. On the promise of both jugs, Pete finally gave in.

When they reached the grove the camera was set up ready for the station agent, who had promised to come over as soon as the morning freight came through. Pete's hands and feet were tied, the noose slipped over his head, and the rope thrown over a branch. His war gear was piled conspicuously at his feet.

The station agent hurried up, panting. "Let's get at it, boys," he urged. "Old 94's a half hour late; might as well finish this up while we're waiting." He patted his shirt pocket. "Danged if I didn't forget this here tellygram I shoulda delivered to the hotel! Oh well," he shrugged, "it'll wait till I'm going up past there again. Let's get this picture took."

The boys took their places. At a signal, the station agent would count to four. On the count of "One!" two of the boys would lift Pete up and hold him. On "Two!" they would leave him hanging and jump back to assume the role of spectators. On the third count the picture would be snapped, and "Four!" would be the signal for those pulling on the rope to lower Pete again. The whole process would take

practically no time; not long enough to choke Pete to amount to anything.

"One!" the command rang loud and clear. Pete protested belatedly as he was lifted into the air.

"Two!" The men holding the rope braced themselves as the lifters gently eased Pete's weight on the rope and jumped back to assume their pose.

"Three! Hold it, boys, hold it! Something's wrong with the camera! The shutter's stuck!" Frantically the agent worked, glancing frequently at the gurgling Pete.

"Four!" he finally shouted relievedly. The lifters jumped to catch Pete but they were too late. He hit the ground with a sodden thud and sprawled grotesquely.

"Get the rope off him quick," the agent shouted.

"I can't get my fingers under it! Who the devil tied this knot, anyhow? Thought you said you could tie a hangman's knot that wouldn't slip!"

"Well, it looked like one, anyhow."

"Hurry up, you fools! He's choking."

"What'll I do?"

"Cut the rope. Knife, somebody, knife!"

"Pete's got one in his belt. Use that."

"Hey, not that way, you fool! You'll cut his throat."

"Cut something! He's turning purple."

"There! Rub his hands. Give him air."

"Hold his head while I pour some whisky down his throat."

"I can't pry his doggone jaws open."

"Strain it through his teeth. Slop it on top of him. He'll absorb it."

As they milled around him, Pete slowly returned to life and made feeble gestures toward the jug. They literally shoved it down his throat. As

he sat up his hand fell on the knife. He picked it up and made a motion of returning it to his belt, but thought better of it. Motioning for the boys to stand back, he struggled to his feet.

Standing alone, he swayed drunkenly. Then, suddenly, he raised the knife high, let out a wild yell, and grabbed the nearest engineer by the hair. The kid jerked free, and Injun Pete let go with another war whoop. He took a few faltering steps after the rapidly disappearing engineers and then collapsed again, his arms around the whisky jugs.

Laughing helplessly, the station agent headed for the hotel to deliver the forgotten "tellygram."

The boys had barricaded themselves on the second floor, and not even the agent's orders nor the hotel man's impassioned pleading could persuade them to start the long-delayed job of surveying a line clear to Fanalulu that day. Their collective scalps prickled ominously every time they glanced toward the river, where Injun Pete was still weaving back and forth uncertainly among the cottonwoods.

The story was too good to keep, and telegraph keys clear down to the division point clattered merrily with the details. It was a big joke to everyone but the general manager.

"Damn those surveyors," he swore, "what're they trying to do with their monkeyshines—get this road in trouble with the Indian bureau? I've stood enough and plenty from them! You!" he roared to a passing relative. "Get the lot of them back here as fast as steam'll bring them. I want the pleasure of firing them myself, personal!"

Just before dawn the next morning the engineers were awakened by the moan of a locomotive whistle growing

louder by the minute. Far down the track a pinpoint of light appeared. It grew brighter and brighter and an engine, pulling a single caboose, roared into town. It came to sudden stop just beyond the station. The engineer released the whistle and, followed by the other trainmen, made for the hotel.

They routed the proprietor out and upstairs they yanked the engineers out of bed and gave them two minutes to get going.

The whistle brought the station agent out of his bunk in a hurry. He pulled on his pants and ran for the hotel. He arrived just as the half-dressed engineers were being hurried down the stairs, despite the remonstrations of the hotel man — who hadn't even had time for pants yet.

"File your claim with the Company," a trainman shouted as he neatly booted the last surveyor out the door. "The G. M. wants these boys, pronto."

As the engineers clambered aboard, a dull explosion, followed by a piercing yell, sounded from the porch of the hotel. They all turned to look. The rapidly moving figure of the station agent was coming toward them. He climbed the embankment in mighty bounds and, bare feet twinkling and suspenders flapping, cut across the circle of light cast by the engine and dis-

appeared into the gloom beyond the shipping-pens.

Another figure emerged from the doorway of the hotel, moving almost as fast. It paused on the embankment and raised an enormous shotgun. The gun roared and another wild yell answered from the shadowy cattlepens.

"You an' your infernal picture-takin' machine," the hotel proprietor shouted. "It's such a damn big joke you've got to blab about it—an' that land buyer from St. Louis'll be here tomorrow! You double-crossin' varmint, I've a mind to take the price of my ranch outa your sneakin' hide!"

He dropped the empty shotgun and, shirttail flapping and red-flannel-encased legs driving like pistons, he too disappeared in the direction of the shipping-corral.

As they moved away from the depot engineers saw Injun Pete, an empty whisky jug in either hand, weaving dizzily up the tracks. He glared at them for a moment and, dropping the jugs, broke into a shambling run after them. Then, as the engine picked up speed, he halted. Fingering his swollen neck gingerly, he croaked, "You come back, huh?" Adding, hopefully, "Bring whisky?"

The hanging of Injun Pete had passed into history.

TOLL ROAD TRAFFIC—1864

BEFORE THE CENTRAL PACIFIC laced its rails across the high Sierra, traffic between California and the fabulous Comstock Lode used the old emigrant trace between Hangtown (Placerville), California, and Genoa, Nevada. A three-months check in the summer of 1864 bears witness to the travel before the days of four-lane pavements, one-percent grades, and service stations: 6667 foot passengers, 833 horsemen, 3164 stage passengers, 5000 pack animals, 2564 teams, and 4649 head of assorted livestock. This was one toll road that was almost as profitable as owning a saloon!

— OLD HUTCH

THE SILVER SADDLE

An Unusual

Short Story

by

Thomas Thompson



As the Marshal says, whatever you have you have to make for yourself . . .

THEY camped that night in a rain-washed gulley ten miles from the town of Prairie Lea, five men who were trail-tired, hungry, and broke. Monte Clovis stood with his back to the fire, gazing off into space, saying nothing, feeling the impatience that had grown with the miles. Jack Renton, hunkered close to the flame, broke small stocks and impatiently tossed them into the blaze. The Kid cleaned his new .45 Colt and kept working the ejector against the empty chambers. The Kid had a narrow face and buck teeth and his down mustache kept tickling his nose. Jack Renton tossed another stick into the fire.

"You act like you figger on usin' that thing, Kid," Jack said.

The Kid laughed, and it was like the whinny of a startled horse. Monte

Clovis heard it and his lips tightened. He disliked The Kid with the same degree of quiet intentness he felt toward mankind in general.

"We'll get another job," The Kid said.

"Where?" Link said. Link had a bad scar across the corner of his left eye.

The Kid spun the gun in his hand. "There's more sheep and there's more cows and where there's sheep and cows there's trouble." The Kid spat across the center of his lips and leered at his companions with an owlish stare. "Ain't that what you say, Monte?"

"You like clubbing sheep, don't you, Kid?" Monte Clovis said. He didn't turn around.

"If I get paid for it," The Kid said.

"You'd like it if you didn't get paid."

"What's the matter, Monte?" The Kid said. "Is there a lawman in that town

over there who might maybe remember you and send you back to Deer Lodge? You been talkin' funny ever since we got near the place."

Monte Clovis turned slowly. "To hell with you, Kid," he said.

"You're touchy, Monte," Jack Renton said. "Bein' broke do that to you?"

"Maybe," Monte said.

"Me too," Jack Renton said. "Two weeks ago we had whisky and women and a job, ammunition furnished. Now we got nothin'."

"Monte's got a saddle with silver on it," The Kid said. "What'd you pay for that pretty saddle, Monte? Five hundred?"

Monte ignored the question. That had been a throwback to the old days, buying that saddle. He liked nice things and money had been coming easy—

"You can't eat a damn saddle," Link said. "We got to do something to make some money."

"Like rob a bank, maybe?" Jack Renton said quickly.

Link and The Kid both laughed at the joke. They had been talking about robbing a bank for two days, just joking. They were fighting men with guns for hire, not bank robbers. Old Faro was over forty, the oldest man in the crew. He had been in and out of jail a lot, Monte knew. He knew the signs.

"How about that, Monte?" The Kid asked. He tried to put a lot of boisterous comradeship in his voice. "You think we ought to rob a bank?"

Monte didn't bother to answer. He kept looking off across the prairie and now he could see the tiny lights of the distant town blinking on, one by one. He got to wondering about the people behind those lights, thinking about Cal Ferris and Mary, and he knew there

was no use fighting it any longer. He'd have to go there—He heard Faro's thin, dry voice.

"What's so funny about robbin' a bank?" Faro said. "It's been done."

There was a scatter of conversation, a low laugh from Link. They were pretending it was all a joke, but they were thinking about it and getting excited about it, and The Kid's eyes were bright with the flame of the fire.

"Don't think I wouldn't," The Kid said.

"There's people in a bank, Kid," Monte said. "People ain't like sheep. People can shoot back."

The Kid's hand dropped and rested against the butt of his gun. "You got something you want to say plainer, Monte?"

"If I did have, I'd say it," Monte said.

"Drop it, you two," Jack Renton said. He had been boss in the range war where these men had hired out their guns. He still considered himself boss.

Monte Clovis felt a little sick. He walked off into the fast gathering shadows and caught up his horse. He had the expensive silver-mounted saddle in his hands when Renton came and stood near him.

"Going someplace?" Renton said.

"That's right. I'm quitting."

"Don't you think maybe you ought to ask me first?"

"No," Monte said. He put the heavy saddle on the bay's back and cinched up.

"I'm boss of this outfit, Monte," Renton said quietly.

"That's all right," Monte said. "I'm still quitting."

"That bank talk scare you out?" That, too, sounded like a joke.

Monte turned and faced the man who had been his boss. Renton was

darkly handsome, a lean man with quick eyes and smiling lips.

"You ain't fooling anybody," Monte said easily. "You've made up your mind to it, so go ahead and do it. Just don't pick Prairie Lea, that's all."

"What's the matter? You got that one staked out for yourself?"

Monte's short laugh was ugly. "Yeah, I own it."

"You might get in trouble ridin' around alone with that hot temper of yours. That wouldn't be good. Maybe you might talk too much."

"Sure," Monte said. "Maybe I might go to the law."

"What would you get? Another five years?"

"Only two," Monte said. "Two great big long ones."

"You better stick with us, Monte."

"Sorry," Monte said. "This deal is on my own."

"What's eatin' on you, Monte?"

"Nothing," Monte said flatly. He tested the stirrup and swung up. His gear, rolled in a yellow slicker, was tied behind his saddle. For a moment he looked down and in spite of himself there was a passing feeling of comradeship for Jack Renton and the men around the fire. Sharing danger with men did that. Maybe sharing danger with a bunch of rattlesnakes would do the same thing.

"Like I told you," Monte said, "I've got personal business in Prairie Lea. Stay away from there until I'm through with it."

Renton was still smiling. He had tossed away the stick he had been breaking in his hands and now he had his right thumb hooked in his gun belt. His voice was soft. "Suppose I tell you you can't go, Monte?"

"Go ahead and tell me," Monte said.

His hand had dropped close to his gun.

Renton's nostrils flared, but the smile never left his lips. "I don't like you runnin' around, knowin' as much as you do. If anything ever went wrong with any of my plans maybe I might come around and see you. I hate a double crosser."

Monte's lips were tight and his eyes were dead with old memories. "So do I," he said, "so stay away from Prairie Lea until I'm through with my business."

He reined his horse and rode toward the lights of the town, but he rode turned in the saddle and he kept his hand near his gun until he was out of range. The starlight glinted on the silver of his saddle.

The town was neither asleep nor awake when he rode into its limits and he had the feeling Prairie Lea would always be this way. A couple strolled along the dark side of the street, arm in arm; a kid, late for supper, hurried home, his bare toes scuffing dust. This would be a good town for kids.

Two men leaned against a porch post in front of the mercantile and smoked a cigarette. They weren't wearing guns. They glanced up casually as Monte rode by. An easy-going town with little to do and few people to do it. Monte tied his horse to the hitchrail in front of a small restaurant and went inside.

The man who came to wait on him at the counter was pleasant and uninteresting, a thin man with a ragged mustache and faded blue eyes.

"We got a real good steak," the waiter said.

"Coffee," Monte said. "Black."

The waiter seemed disappointed. He drew a cup of coffee from the nickel

urn and slid it down the counter. "Stranger here, ain't you?"

"That's right," Monte said.

"This ain't a bad little town. Got a good bank." Monte raised his eyes swiftly. The waiter was grinning. "Like the feller says, you can tell how good a town is by the size of the bank."

"I suppose," Monte said. He didn't want conversation. He wanted to think, even though that was all he had been doing for more years than he wanted to remember. And yet, now that he was so close to the end of the trail, he needed to think some more. It was a big step, killing a man. And even if he could make it self-defense it would mean two more of those long years because of the terms of his parole.

The door opened and Monte's hand jerked nervously. A man who looked like a sheepherder came in and slouched down on a stool.

"The same as always, Pete?" the waiter said to the grizzled oldster.

"The same as always," Pete said.

He shouldn't be surprised, Monte supposed, that Mary would come to a town like this. It was a good place to hide from the past. But he wondered how she could stand it, day after day. Mary had been so different in those days that now seemed like another age. She had been charged with life, not afraid to live it. She had been tired of the sameness of a town similar to this, starved for excitement. And Monte Clovis had happened along and he had been different. He wondered, thinking of how things had worked out, if that was all there was about him that had attracted her. It wasn't a flattering thought.

He paid for his coffee and went outside and for a long time he stood on the sidewalk, rolling a cigarette, smoking

it. He kept thinking about Cal Ferris and the old days and of how he and Cal had been friends—The cigarette was suddenly bitter and he threw it away.

A voice at his elbow said, "Nice evening, ain't it?"

He turned swiftly and then he stopped, his compressed breath going slowly from his lungs. It was the old man who had come into the restaurant. He still looked like a sheepherder as far as dress and the stubble of gray beard was concerned, but there was an erectness and an alertness about him and his eyes, Monte saw, were a bright, clear blue. He stood with his thumbs hooked in his belt, his rusty coat pushed back. There was a star on his greasy vest.

"Yeah," Monte said slowly. "It's a nice evening, Sheriff."

"Marshal," the old man corrected. He nodded toward Monte's horse. "Reckon that's about the fanciest riffin' I ever seen."

"I like it," Monte said.

There was the faintest hint of a smile on the marshal's lips. He reached into his vest pocket with a startling swiftness and withdrew a toothpick which he inserted carefully between strong teeth on the left side of his mouth. "Who you lookin' for?"

"Am I looking for someone?"

"I'd say so," the marshal said. "Prairie Lea is a farm town. You're a rider. We're off the beaten path here. The only strangers we see are drummers. You ain't one."

"I'm just riding through."

The marshal withdrew the toothpick with that same quick motion. He studied the end of it. "Just thought you might be lookin' for someone," he said. "My name's Pete Winthrop. I

know everybody around here. I could maybe help you if you was lookin' for somebody."

He couldn't ask about Mary, even if he had wanted to. He didn't even know what name she might be using. Besides, he figured it would be best if their meeting came about in a way that would make it seem accidental.

"Tell me where I can put up my horse?" Monte said.

"Sure," Marshal Pete Winthrop said. "Kelly's place, right out at the north edge of town. He's cheapest and he'll let you sleep in the haymow."

Monte felt a tightening of his face muscles and then a touch of color flowing up his throat. This old duffer could really read a man.

"Thanks," he said shortly. He walked over and untied his horse and swung into the saddle. As he rode down the street he saw the old marshal standing there, holding his toothpick, staring thoughtfully.

"Kelly will buy that saddle off you if you want to sell it," the marshal called after him.

"I don't," Monte said. He didn't look back.

The town was set at what had once been a confluence of two wagon roads and those forgotten roads were now the streets. The bank stood in the fork of the Y, a brick building with a green door. Monte passed it to the left and went on to Kelly's stable, which he could see up the street. The barn had been built in a flush of enthusiasm and business had never caught up with its size.

Kelly, the stableman, was a sandy-haired Irishman with a round face and a red mouth that exuded faint fumes of good whisky when he talked, which he did continuously. He stared open-

mouthed at the silver saddle and caressed it with a hungry hand. He was generous with the oat ration, for which Monte gave him his last dollar.

"Yes, sir, as I was saying," Kelly said, "the hotel ain't much at best and if a man's got his bedroll—which I see you have—he'd be a sight better off just stretchin' himself out in the hay there." He stood there, holding the saddle. "I'd sure like to buy this off you—"

Monte grunted his refusal. It angered him to realize it was so obvious that he was down and out.

He put his slicker down and laid his blankets on that and stretched out, fully dressed except for his boots, his hands laced behind his head. A bat swerved through the dim blue light above the rafters and a small night animal scampered across the warped shingles.

Thirty years old, Monte Clovis thought, and this is the best I can command. He thought of Cal Ferris and of Mary and of the night the sheriff had trapped him in a town not unlike this one. Five long years they had given him. Five years in which to think and brood and hate while Cal Ferris and Mary went their way together, forgetting him.

The hatred he felt was no longer a hot, vital thing. It had grown too old for that. It was something that lay inside him, bearing down, seaming his face and toning his speech. And tomorrow he would find Mary, somehow, and without knowing it she would tell him about Cal and then he could be on his way.

Old habit had made him sensitive to sounds and he awoke fully without moving. He heard Kelly, speaking softly, heard another voice, a small drone of sound, and then he knew that Kelly

was going outside. He drew his gun and held it under the blankets while he held his breath and listened. Someone was coming.

"Monte?" The voice that called his name was low and husky and charged, a voice he had waited years to hear.

"That's right, Mary." He had trouble speaking.

The girl stepped up on the manger and climbed into the haymow and now Monte's heart was beating wildly and he couldn't control it. A dozen times he had sworn he would kill her, and every time he knew he was lying. He loved her.

She was walking toward him, sinking knee-deep into the yielding hay, and she threw herself down close to him. He tossed back the blankets and reached for her, hungry with five years of memory. She drew away from him and he sat there, closing and unclosing his hands.

"How did you know I was here?"

"Pete Winthrop," she said. "He knows all about me."

"But he didn't know me."

"He said there was a gunman in town," Mary said quietly. "He thought I might want to know." She put her face in her hands. "I knew it was you when he told me about the saddle." She looked up and he could see only the outline of her face but he knew she had aged because her voice had aged. "Why did you come here? Why do you want to stir up trouble? I've lived down my past here, Monte."

"I'm not bringing any trouble."

"Then why did you come?"

"I had to see you again, Mary. That's all."

"It's no good, Monte, you know that. It can't lead to anything."

"It could have, Mary."

"No it couldn't have," she said desperately. "We were both crazy. We had a wild streak and it would have gone from bad to worse—"

"You loved me."

She acted as if he had hit her and after a moment of silence she started to cry. "I'm glad you knew that," she said.

He took her in his arms and held her close, his lips against the fragrance of her hair, his heart beating wildly. "We could love each other again."

He felt her trembling and knew she hadn't forgotten and now nothing mattered. He forced her head back to kiss her lips and she threw herself away from him.

"No, Monte. No. We had our chance and we spoiled it."

"Cal Ferris spoiled it." He hadn't meant to say that but the bitterness was too great and suppressed passion forced the words through his lips.

"Cal had nothing to do with it," she said quickly. "We brought it on ourselves. We weren't strong enough to go straight. There was that bank job and then that wasn't enough and you had to try another. Every job was going to be the last one and it never was. We were poison for each other, Monte."

"Cal was with us. He was part of the gang."

"But Cal quit. You didn't."

"He quit so he could turn me in to the law. He quit so I'd be out of the way and he could have you."

"That isn't so, Monte."

"You ran away with him after they picked me up, didn't you?"

She buried her face in her hands again and her voice was muffled when she spoke. "Where else could I have gone?"

"How long did it last?" He was speaking in a half whisper, trying to keep the wounded bitterness out of his voice, failing.

"What difference does it make?"

"He walked out on you, just like I knew he would. I wouldn't have walked out on you, Mary, regardless of what."

"No, you wouldn't have," she said quietly. "You gave me everything and took everything and we didn't even dare get a marriage license for fear of putting our names on a piece of paper. Yes, you would have stayed with me, and one day you would have gotten yourself killed or you would have spent the rest of your life in prison. That's what we did to each other, Monte. We never once brought out the good in each other, and there was good in both of us, at first."

"Where did he leave you?"

"I didn't say he did."

"Where was it?" He had to know. He had to find Cal Ferris and kill him and get this old shadow out of the way.

"He didn't leave me, Monte. He married me."

Monte Clovis felt the breath leave his lungs and there was a terrifying moment in which his heart stood still in a vacuum. He tried twice before he was able to speak. "Is he here?"

"Yes."

The trembling left and now the old dead coal of hatred was glowing into life. He no longer whispered. "So he sent you here to try to buy me off! I'd expect that."

She slapped him hard and the sting of her hand reached down inside him and was fuel for the burning coal. He reached out and gripped her wrists and held her until she no longer struggled against him.

"He didn't send me," she managed to say. "He doesn't even know you're here. If he did know he would have come himself."

"Then tell him I'm here," he said. He released his grip and shoved her away and she struggled to her feet. She wasn't crying now and he could see her dress, faded with a hundred washings. Her hair was in disarray and she stood with shoulders slouched as if she were very tired.

"Leave us alone, Monte," she said quietly, and there was the same quality in her voice he had heard in the voice of men ready to draw a gun. "We made our mistakes and we paid for them, and Cal and I have had our life here. It hasn't been much of a life, but it's been ours and it's been decent. People don't know about us and they leave us alone. If anything happens now the newspapers will dig up the whole filthy mess. They'll know that Cal was an outlaw and they'll know I was worse—a thrill-crazy kid riding with a band of crazy men."

"Tell Cal I'm here."

Her hand was at her throat and now it moved down inside her dress. He thought first of a gun and he lunged to his feet and started toward her. Her hand came out of her dress and she was holding a square of cardboard.

"Light a match and look at this," she said.

He knew it was a picture before he saw it. His hands were trembling and he struck a match on his thumbnail and held it until the sulphur glare was gone and then he looked at the photograph. The girl was about five years old. She had hair done in pigtails and her smile was broad, her eyes intent and serious. He felt a tearing sickness and the rafters of the barn spun around his head.

"You never told me."

"Why should I have?" she said.

"What could you have done?"

"But she's mine. She's my daughter!"

Mary shook her head. "Her name is Ferris. That's my name and it's my husband's name. Regardless of how many mistakes you make, someday you find a way to make up for some of them. This is my way and Cal's way. It hasn't been easy for either of us, but Mona will never know."

"Mona." He said the name softly.

"We used to talk about it—"

"Now will you leave, Monte?"

"I've got to see her."

She shook her head and he knew she was right even before she spoke, just as he knew he was going to fight her answer. "It wouldn't accomplish anything. It would just be harder for you and for Cal. Cal's been a good father to her. You owe him something, Monte. Even you're decent enough to realize that."

He stepped forward suddenly and took her in his arms and the old memories were stronger than ever. He held her close and his mouth found her lips.

"We've got to be together, the three of us. I won't kill Cal. I'll give him that much, but he's got to give me what's mine—"

She pushed away from him disgustedly. "You still think only of yourself, don't you, Monte? You aren't even big enough to consider your own daughter."

"My God, Mary, I've spent five years in prison—"

"It's been a bed of roses for me," she said bitterly. "It's been fine for Cal, too. Your five years in prison were easy compared to his five years. Just remember that."

She turned and walked across the

hay, sinking into it, walking laboriously, and he saw that her life had been a laborious walk because of her mistakes and because of him.

He didn't call to her. He sat there thinking, shaking as if with a chill, and night passed into the first cold of pre-dawn and the town was asleep. Below him, in the room behind the office, Kelly snored loudly.

His body was wet with the heat of nervousness and sleep was out of the question. He put on his boots with swift, jerking movements and rolled his blankets into a sloppy bundle.

Mary was right, of course, but a man had his rights. He thought of Jack Renton and the boys out there in the dry coulee and he knew they'd still be awake, kidding themselves about robbing a bank, trying to fire themselves up to the point where they would actually do it. He thought of Old Faro and of his own experience in the past.

He could send some money to Mary to help out for a while. And in time he could change Mary's feelings. He knew he could, for holding her and kissing her had told him that everything wasn't dead between them.

Kelly continued to snore while Monte caught up his horse and saddled. The saddle was heavy and the dim light from the single lantern that hung on the wall struck fire from the silver conchas. He swung up and ducked low as he rode through the barn door and he was out on the street before he saw the lights in the bank. He had to ride near the windows and natural curiosity made him look inside.

A man was mopping the floor, dipping the mop into soapy water, squeezing it with his hands, mopping the floor. He wore shabby clothes and his shoulders were stooped, but he was not

an old man. He wore no hat and his roughly cut hair was graying across the back of his head. He put down the mop and stood there a second, his hand pressed to the small of his back, and then he walked across the room and picked up a cuspidor. He straightened and his face was fully exposed in the light.

Monte Clovis felt as if someone had clubbed him in the pit of the stomach. He sat there in his saddle, staring at that face, unable to move, and the horse sensed something wrong and started to prance nervously.

The janitor in the bank turned from the window and took the cuspidor to a barrel and dumped it. He took a rag and wiped the spittoon carefully with hands that had once dealt fast cards and handled a fast gun. Over and over Mary's words pounded through Monte's head, making him dizzy.

"Your five years in prison were easy compared to Cal's five years—"

That janitor—that old man—was Cal Ferris. That janitor was the man who was working to support Monte Clovis's daughter.

The reaction was as swift as the shock. His first thought was to dismount and rattle the door and talk to Cal—kill him if it came to that—get it over with. And then there was a greater anger, the anger of wounded pride. He wanted to strike back with money—show Cal and Mary that he could do something.

He wheeled his horse and rode back to Kelly's stable, sick and trembling inside, not entirely sure of what he would do. He dismounted and pounded on the door of the office and he heard Kelly's snoring break off suddenly.

"Hold your horses. I'm coming."

Kelly came out, blinking against the

dim glare of the lantern, scratching his shoulder, hitching at the beltless pants he had pulled on over his long underwear. "Damn this business. A man never gets a night's sleep—Oh, it's you."

"You said you wanted to buy this saddle, didn't you?" Monte gripped the old man by his underwear and shook him. "All right, I'll sell it. Give me an old hull I can use. You said you wanted to buy it."

"Now hold on now—"

"Put up or shut up, damn it. How much will you give me?"

"Well, now," Kelly said, hitching his shoulders.

"Two hundred dollars and an old hull I can use. Hell, man, I paid five hundred."

"It's a cheap price, Kelly." The voice was soft but wide-awake. Pete Winthrop, the marshal, stood just inside the door, the eternal toothpick in his mouth.

Monte whirled and faced the marshal. He was breathing heavily and the sweat was running down his cheeks.

"Keep out of it, lawman. It's none of your damn business if a man is down and out and wants to sell his saddle."

"I just said it was a cheap price," the marshal said.

"A hundred and fifty and a decent hull to ride," Kelly said.

Monte jerked the latigo and pulled the expensive saddle free. The bay trembled and sidestepped. Monte half threw the saddle toward Kelly. "Give me a rig I can ride."

His hands shook as Kelly counted out the money and then Monte turned, his eyes bright. He thrust the money into the marshal's hands.

"Give this to Mary Ferris. I owe it to her. I borrowed it from her dad a long

time ago. That's why I came here, see? That's why she came to see me. I wanted to stall paying this off but she's gonna cause me trouble. Damn you to hell, that's all it is, you see?"

The marshal folded the bills carefully. He was a grizzled man, fat around the middle, but his eyes were clear and young. "As I said, it's a cheap price."

Monte's fists doubled and he took two steps toward the marshal and then his hands relaxed. Why fool himself? He didn't even have the right to hit a man for an insult any more.

Kelly was putting a fair saddle on the bay. "You leavin' us?"

Monte didn't answer. He threw himself into the saddle and spurred the bay. He knew the marshal was standing there looking after him, his eyes bright and knowing.

Monte spurred the horse into a full run. He didn't look in the window as he passed the bank, but the light was still on and that tired old man, only thirty years old, was working inside, earning the money to support a wife and a child.

He was past the bank when he saw the horses in the alley, hidden between two buildings. He wouldn't have noticed, perhaps, but an old pattern, deep in the bottom of his brain, flashed out as clearly as a picture. He could see only the dim shapes of the horses but he didn't need to see them to recognize them.

He pulled up sharply and turned back and now he glanced in the window. Cal Ferris was putting his mop and bucket in a closet. The town was deathly still.

For just a moment the last of the old hatred flared to life like a dying coal touched by a passing breeze. All the

nervousness left, leaving Monte Clovis the cold, mechanical machine he had always been. His lips were tight against his teeth and the five years of hell were pressing in on him. Here was the answer, ready-made.

To hell with it, he thought. *What do I care if Jack Renton wants to rob a bank?* He thought of The Kid and of all the plans that had been made, just in fun, and he thought of Cal Ferris. Suppose Renton did rob this bank and Cal Ferris got killed? He remembered Mary and the little girl and he thought of Mary looking at him through the years, silently accusing him—

"To hell with all of them," he said savagely. "I've done what I could. A man can't do more than to sell his saddle—"

His thoughts kept twisting around until he was afraid he was losing his senses. Maybe he was going crazy. He kept hearing the marshal: "*It's a cheap price.*" The marshal was a stupid man who knew everything and he had guts enough to stand there and say it was cheap for a man to buy his way out of his obligations for a hundred and fifty bucks—"

"To hell with all of them," he said again, and even while he said it he was spurring back toward the stable. The marshal was standing there.

"Thought you left town," he said.

"Your damn bank is about to be held up," Monte said. He spat the words through his teeth. "I thought you might want to know about it."

The marshal dropped his toothpick and stepped inside Kelly's office. He had a shot gun in his hand when he came back out. "You trying to pull something, Clovis?"

The name slapped against Monte like a wet glove. The marshal knew him.

He had known him all the time. The damn marshal knew everything.

"Sure I'm trying to pull something," Monte said. "I'm always trying to pull something. Just forget it."

The marshal moved slowly. He broke the double-barrel gun and slipped in two buckshot-loaded shells. "How many?" he said calmly.

"How should I know?" Monte snapped. "I saw four horses. Maybe the horses are packing double. How should I know?"

"Friends of yours, ain't they?"

"Go ask 'em," Monte said. "I'm leavin' town."

"Yeah, I reckon you better," the marshal said. "They won't like it, you turnin' 'em in that way. Anything makes a filthy low-down crook mad is to have a friend of his do something decent. Somehow that's one thing a crook can't stand." The marshal turned his back and started walking swiftly toward the bank.

For a moment Monte Clovis sat there, thinking of Jack Renton and of Faro and Link, thinking most of The Kid with his new .45. He threw himself from the saddle and started after the marshal, his breath torturing his lungs.

"Stay away from that front door, you damn fool," he said savagely. "Take the side and I'll take the back."

They were close to the bank now. Through the window they saw Cal Ferris putting on his coat, his arms imprisoned by the sleeves. A man stepped through the back door into the bank. It was The Kid, and he had his new gun in his hand. They could see The Kid's lips move; they couldn't hear what he said. They saw Cal Ferris stand there, his arms bound by his coat, his face draining of color. The Kid was raising the gun.

Monte Clovis didn't wait for any signal from the marshal. He knew The Kid wouldn't shoot—that had been part of the plan. The Kid was supposed to knock Cal in the head with his gun. And that's what The Kid would do. Only after that he would stand there and club and club. Monte had seen The Kid club sheep. It had made Monte sick.

He drew his gun and ran straight around the corner of the bank. He saw two shapes there and he started firing.

He felt the slug rip into his stomach, knocking him backward, he heard the throaty boom of the marshal's shotgun, and then there was a shot from inside the bank. The Kid must have missed with his clubbing.

The world was spinning and red and he felt as if he were torn apart but he kept moving forward. There was only one man in front of him now. The other was on the ground. Faro dropped his gun and stood there and Monte knocked him aside as he plunged into the now dark interior of the bank. Somewhere he heard The Kid laughing with that high, whinnying sound. He fired into the darkness and a gun answered from only feet away.

Monte felt that first rush of strength leaving him. His knees were giving, he was going to fall. He fought the trigger of his gun and nothing happened and now The Kid was laughing again. The Kid was close and he knew Monte was wounded. Monte could tell by The Kid's laugh.

"Cal! Cal, listen to me. It's Monte—" Damn it to hell, he'd rather die from a bullet than be clubbed to death by that crazy kid. "Right here, Cal. It's Monte—"

Cal Ferris's voice was soft. "Keep low, Monte." It was like a voice out of

the past—a past when he and Cal Ferris had been friends. Monte let himself fall and a gun blasted out of the darkness. The Kid stopped in the middle of that laugh.

He came up out of the swirling darkness and his fingers tightened on the covers of the bed. The room was dark and at first there was a terrifying fear in him that he was dead or blind. He ran his tongue across his fever-blistered lips and the consciousness returned.

A familiar voice said, "Feelin' better?" It was Marshal Pete Winthrop.

It seemed hours before Monte Clovis answered. "You made a good haul, Marshal. Jack Renton—The Kid—"

"And Monte Clovis," the marshal said. "Runnin' around with known criminals, gettin' in trouble.

"It's all right," Monte Clovis said.

The marshal grunted. "Sometimes it's harder for a man out of jail than it is in, don't you reckon?"

"I guess so," Monte said.

"Take you, now," the marshal said. "Jail's too damn good for you. I'm gonna say you was workin' for me as a duly appointed deputy."

"I'm not asking for anything."

"I ain't givin' you anything," the marshal said. "You got to make it for yourself."

"I guess that's always the way."

Then he heard Mary's voice, quiet and timid. "Is it all right to see him now, Pete?"

"Sure," the marshal said. "It's all right." He got up wearily and left the room.

Monte turned his head and he saw Mary and Cal hesitate in the doorway and then someone was by his bed.

He turned and saw her, a little girl

of five, a girl with pigtails and wide, intent eyes.

"Who are you?" the little girl said.

It was Mary who answered. "He's your daddy's best friend, darling."

"Are you my daddy's best friend?"

Cal Ferris was close to the bed now. He reached down and put one arm around the child and lifted her up. Impulsively the child kissed him on the cheek. Cal's right hand was there, near the bed. Monte Clovis closed his eyes tightly.

"It's the other way around, honey," he managed to say. "Your daddy is my best friend." He felt Cal's hand fumble under the covers and find his own.

The child was pleased. "Are you going to live with us?"

It wasn't so hard for Monte to speak now. "No," he said. "As soon as I'm well I have to go a long ways away."

"I like you," the child said. "Do you have a little girl?"

He heard Mary's quick sob stifled behind her hand; he saw the knotting of the muscles on Cal's jaw.

"No, honey," Monte Clovis said. "I don't have a little girl."

He looked at Cal, old and tired for his years, and Cal was holding the child possessively and proudly; there was pride in the set of his jaw and the flare of his nostrils. And Mary was standing there, an older Mary with a dress faded from a hundred washings, a Mary with a hint of gray in her gold hair. Mary's eyes were bright and unafraid.

He looked at the little girl and knew it was the last time he would ever see her.

"I'll send you a pretty present from far away," he said, and he closed his eyes tightly and heard Cal Ferris and his family leave the room.

Verne
Athanas



OINTMENT *for* MANGAS

The giant Apache lived to kill white men—and it looked to Lucey as if Mangas was set to live high that day!

HE had been expecting it, but still it happened awfully fast. One moment he was scuffling along at his easy trot, and the next the Apache buck was hanging in mid-air over him, and coming down from a vaulting leap over the rock.

It was close—too close. Lucey got the pistol up in time to slide the slicing hatchet blade aside, but this kind of dog-fighting was what the Apache did best. Off balance, the Apache was letting his body go on past, limply, ready to take his tumbler's fall and come up from the side.

No good. No good at all. Lucey dragged up and back, with the thick pistol butt deep in his fist, and the high front sight caught on the buck's neck and dragged and checked him for just a tiny fraction of a second. He brought

his heavy knife around in a wiping motion, not putting much thrust on the blade, letting the razor edge do its own work.

The buck felt it too late. His muddy eyes widened, and his mouth opened in a soundless squall. He arched his back convulsively, whipping himself into an arc without leverage to throw himself back, and then his belly muscles gave way and his guts spilled out and his spine went with a dry-branch crack. He came down in a huddle that wasn't a man any more; but like a clubbed snake, there was life in him yet, and the hatchet lashed out again. Lucey's black wool pants suddenly fell open from calf to cuff, and a streak of hurt bit at his shin.

He stamped with the other foot, grinding the moccasin sole down hard

on the greasy wrist, and he stooped and wiped with the knife again. The buck made a bubbling sound and jerked and Lucey lifted his foot from the wrist only as he pivoted away. He did not even look back at the Apache.

He didn't stop to investigate the leg either. It worked, and that was all that counted now. They were out there, more of them, had to be; coursing like hounds, fanned to keep him headed. He kept at his scuffling limping trot, not showing himself above the jumbled rocks.

It was so damned deadly quiet. He could still hear the faint ringing in his ears from the shot he'd fired way back there. He was a little winded from his run and the short and violent tussle with the buck.

I'm getting too old for this, he thought. And then: *Four loads left in the cylinder. If they don't jump me now, I can make it.*

On the heels of the thought the outraged squall came up from behind. They'd found the buck he'd gutted. He had a sudden chilling thought that there wouldn't be time enough now, but he held himself to his gait. The leg was a steady jumping ache now, and the dry hot air was cutting into the pink moisture of his lungs with every dragging breath.

Through the dog-leg in between the three hulking boulders, then the last open stretch of gravelly sand and scrubby brush. Then the flat whip crack of the carbine lashed spitefully at him and the ricochet made its deafening scream almost in his ear.

He went full length onto the ground and yelped, "Hold your fire, you damn fool. Me, Lucey."

He kept scrabbling, working his knees and elbows to slide himself. Hell of a

note. Damned bucks hacking at his tail and a trigger-happy recruit up ahead with a carbine.

Time enough. The words should have gotten through even the numb layers of a dumb recruit's brain by now. If it hadn't it would still be better to take a bullet than what the bucks would give him. He came to his knees and then on up to a crouch, never really having stopped, and heard the recruit's scared apologetic voice and the *slack clap* of the carbine's action working.

Even now the muzzle was automatically tracking him in, and he wasn't really sure the rookie had him pegged right until he was across the flat and into the rocks.

"Hell," the recruit said with peevish scaredness, "you popped out there so fast, and—"

"Yeah," grunted Lucey. "You can do what you damn please, now. There's some of 'em out there behind me. Where's Moynihan?"

The soldier had whipped the carbine muzzle back onto the opening at his first words, knuckles dead-white where they squeezed the skimpy forearm of the weapon, and he said jerkily without looking around, "Down by the horses, I guess. Dammit, I hope he sends another man up here."

"Yeah," said Lucey again, and he limped on down into the bowl through the piled rocks.

Moynihan came to meet him, a tough-faced Irishman so lean and mean and burned and dried out by his years in service that no one would ever peg him for anything but Army even if they saw him naked in a shower stall.

"That shot for you?" he said now in half-question and half-statement.

Lucey said wryly, "That recruit is pretty lonesome up there."

"He's got the softest spot," returned Moynihan. "I've seen rifle ranges tougher than that." He paused then, as if he hated to make the words. "You've seen the captain?"

"Yeah. He's dead."

Moynihan cursed softly, and his eyes clung to Lucey with a sort of grim desperation. "Bad?"

"They'd messed him up some. I shot him before they got the fire going too hot. They're hot, Moynihan. One of 'em caught up with me on the way back, and I wasn't doin' any lingerin'."

"It was naught but God's mercy," the Irishman said earnestly. "He'd've done the same for you if he could."

"Yeah," said Lucey. Then he raised his head and pointed with his chin down toward the hollow of the basin. "What's the word?"

"Four hit. Two of 'em 'll die by tonight. The lieutenant and them damn civilians are still hashin' it over as to how it all started."

Lucey smiled, a bleak wintry smile that was completely humorless. "They can ask Mangas when he comes after them," he said. "He's out there."

Moynihan said quietly, "And I had enough money to buy out, after that last poker game."

"Yeah. And I hope I live to see that day, Moynihan. I'll be old enough to have seen it all, the day you buy out."

"Come on," said the Irishman. "The lieutenant will be wantin' a report."

Lieutenant Marker didn't like Bun Lucey, and that was all right. He didn't like Marker. Which is just the way things go, sometimes. You like a man or you don't, but Marker tried too hard. He was a gentleman,

and he'd learned the stuff to give the troops. Treat 'em kindly but firmly, and never forget you're a gentleman. Never abuse a man before his outfit, and you can lead a man where you can't drive him. If you set a good example, the men will follow your lead, and if a good officer takes care of his men they'll take care of him. But Marker tried too hard.

He was as dirty and sweaty and unshaven as the rest, now, almost self-consciously so, but he was still trying. The played finger marks of his gloves showed where he had beaten at his shirt, and his kerchief was knotted a little carelessly when he'd put it back after mopping his face.

Wants 'em all to know it's pretty tough, thought Lucey.

Marker turned now as they came up, Lucey and Moynihan, and his eyes settled with a sort of intent fascination on Lucey's. But he said first, "You checked that shot, Sergeant?"

"Darrel mistook Lucey for an Apache, sir."

Marker came back to Lucey and said, "He looks enough like one," and then smiled to take the sting out of the words. Then seriously, "What word of Captain Lynch?"

Lucey said laconically, "He's dead. I shot him."

A sudden pallor shot under the wind-burn of Marker's face. "My God, man! If you could get that close, we might have had a chance—"

Lucey let the brutal words come out in a flat unemotional voice. "They had him half-skinned, Lieutenant. His eyes was gone and his hair was afire when I shot him. He was too damn good a man to go the way they was doin' it. I'd do as much for a dog."

He laid it in with that flat voice, and

watched the lieutenant. Marker went sick-white around the mouth and said again, "My God."

Lucey waited a moment longer, and then added, "They wasn't none of the rest of 'em around. This is all that's left of the troop, Lieutenant." He waited a moment longer, and when Marker still did not speak, he asked gently, "What's the next move, Lieutenant?"

That snapped Marker out of it a little, and he could almost see him mentally thumbing through the book.

The wounded. Can't leave them. Short of mounts, anyway. Good defensive position, maybe a little too much perimeter. But cavalry is not an efficient defensive weapon—

He turned to Lucey now and said, "Think they'll hit us again? Today, I mean?"

"Pretty sure," said Lucey. "I broke up their party, and they'll be projectin' around to keep busy. Yeah, I reckon they'll hit us."

For the first time, he let himself look past the lieutenant to where the two civilians were hunkered in the meager shade of a slab of boulder. Two miners, Stockstill and the other, holding their aloofness from the troopers, and the troopers ignoring them in their own way.

You bastards, he thought. A lot of good men are going to die on your account. Mangas wouldn't give any more than his right arm to get you spitted over a fire.

Lieutenant Marker said quite suddenly, "We'll try for the flats. Sergeant, pass the word. Double up the wounded with the lightest troopers. Send a corporal to bring in the perimeter, but each man's to keep an eye on his sector until the command Mount."

For a moment, Moynihan looked as if he were about to say something, and then he thought better of it. He went away at a trot.

Lucey said mildly, "They're thicker'n fleas down that way, Lieutenant."

"And we're sitting ducks here, Lucey. Will you be ready to move with the troop?" There was ice in that last, and Lucey felt a hot little burn of resentment. Out of the book. Lead 'em, don't drive 'em. But chop it off short under 'em if they forget their place.

"I'm ready now," Lucey said shortly.

It was something under a mile out of the canyon. The troop made less than half of that. Only it wasn't a troop. It had been half a troop to begin with, what with a disinterested Department and the Sioux raising hell up north, and ten of them, not counting the wounded, had gone when Captain Lynch got his. This time perhaps eighteen of them rallied on the sergeant. Moynihan, lean and mean and tough, his horse shot out from under him, came into the rocks with his pistol and the lieutenant's shirt collar all in one hand, and the other hand running a steady stream of red.

He let the lieutenant drop and squalled in a voice as gritty as a shovel edge on stone, "B Troop! In here. Dis-mount. Give 'em hell, boys!" He wheeled with the pistol at the end of a stiff arm and knocked a scrambling buck off a boulder with one shot. Another one came right into the troop, whining like a hound, a captured carbine cradled at the hip. Lucey shot him through the belly at less than ten feet, and a trooper made a hurt yell and smashed the buck's head with his carbine butt as the buck's weapon went off almost at his back.

The carbines broke it up, finally, and Moynihan essayed a sidling, stooping run to his dead horse and back.

He gnawed at the cork of the flat little half-pint and spat it out. "Twenty mortal days I packed this in my saddlebags," he said. "And wid true strength of character, I touched never a drop. But I knew 'twould be handy, one day." He ignored his flapping, bloody hand, and tipped up the bottle with the other. His thickened brogue was the only sign he made of his hurt.

He sat down, clamped the flask between his knees, and dug out his spring knife. He lifted his left hand, and the third finger dangled. He flipped the hand to straighten it, and laid it up against the gnarled stem of a handy greasewood. The knife blade slid between meat and hide, his teeth went into his lip, and the finger fell off. He sloshed whisky on the welling stump, pulled the flap of skin he'd cut over the end, and bound it there with a strip torn with his teeth from his neckerchief.

He took another long swig from the bottle, then looked critically at Lieutenant Marker. He lay where Moynihan had dropped him. An arrow had peeled a flap as wide and long as a man's finger just above the ear on the right side, and a bit of the feathering was plastered with blood to the wound.

Moynihan looked at him unemotionally, and then up at Lucey. "Some people have all the luck," he said. He sloshed whisky at the wound, and Marker unconsciously rolled his head from this fresh bite. With the casual roughness of drenching a horse, Moynihan jammed a thumb into the Lieutenant's jaw hinge, pushed the neck of the flask between the parted teeth and let the last dribble run down the

man's throat. Marker came up gagging.

Moynihan said in a flat carrying voice, "Corporal, tell 'em to fire only at plain targets. They're not seeing that many."

The corporal said, "Yo," and ran crouching toward the noisiest cluster of rock. Marker sat up, then put his aching head in his hands.

A man started screaming then. Lucey wheeled and trotted, threading through the piled rock until he came to three of them bellied down; oldtimers with cartridges ready between the fingers of the left hand, carbines cocked but not firing.

The sound was coming from just past the next screen of rock, the naked screaming of a man in mortal fear and hurt. The middle trooper of the trio looked around as Lucey came up, twisted to dig out a thumb-sized remnant of plug tobacco. He bit it carefully in two, put the rest back in his pocket.

Lucey said, "Who'd they catch?"

"Browder, I think." The trooper's jaw came down hard on the chew, and for just a moment the beard-blurred line of his jaw quivered. Then it took up a steady rolling motion. "Marked him down about over there, when they first jumped us. Thought he was dead. Went like a sack of spuds. Too bad he wasn't."

"Yeah," said Lucey.

The trooper chewed and spat and said obliquely, "Any chance?"

Lucey put out a hand for the man's carbine, got it, wriggled over to the slot where two boulders came together, and pushed with the butt on the gravelly hot earth, pushing a little ridge ahead of it, such as a man's elbow might make if he were resting on it to peek out. He flipped the butt in a

little flirting motion, and the bullet came screaming through in the same instant. He crawled back.

"They're usin' him for bait," he said briefly, and gave the man his carbine. The trooper didn't thank him or even look at him.

A hand gun went *whamwhamwham* off to his right, and he looked to see one of the miners, the big one, Red Stockstill, phlegmatically emptying his pistol at something out of sight. He was so casual about it that Lucey didn't catch on until the hammer snapped twice on the empty cylinder.

Stockstill felt Lucey's hand on his shoulder, and he came around with a strangled sound and whipped at Lucey's head with the barrel of the pistol. He was frozen stiff, and didn't really see Lucey at all. Lucey got a hand on the wrist, threw his weight on it, and cracked the whip with the man's heavy bulk. Stockstill took a couple of staggering strides and smacked the flat of his broad back against a boulder. It jarred some sense into him, and he stared at Lucey for a long moment as the blankness went out of his eyes. Then he began to shake.

Lucey said bitterly, "You stinking yellow slob!"

Stockstill's lips worked under the dirt and whiskers, and he said, "It was Mangas. I seen him. He looked right at me. I seen him, I tell you!"

"I hope he did," said Lucey. "I hope he got a good look. I hope he remembered who skinned his back with a bullwhip. I hope when he gets you you'll see the rest of 'em—that Fraley girl and the two kids and their folks, and Captain Lynch—with their bellies open and their eyes gone; 'cause damn you. Stockstill, you're the one that done it. You give him his name and

half of his meanness; and I hope to God you pay for it."

Suddenly he couldn't stomach the sight of the man any longer, and he wheeled violently away and ran crouching to where he'd left Moynihan. The screaming of the man the Apaches had out there in the rocks went on and on.

Lieutenant Marker was on his feet, pale and shaky, but under his own power. He asked a little fuzzily, "They all right over there?"

"They'll hold," said Lucey shortly, "till Mangas gets tired of playin' and comes in after us."

Marker said almost absently, "All right," but Moynihan looked at Lucey sharply, the hurt of his mangled hand beginning to show around his eyes and mouth. He came closer and inquired softly. "That bad?"

"He's got help coming," Lucey said morosely. "Saw the dust from the other side. What we got left?"

"Twelve up, four down, counting you, me, and the lieutenant. Ten up if them damn' civilians don't do more than they have." He took a deep shaky, breath that belied the flat unemotion of his voice. "Six mounts."

Lucey thought bleakly, *We ain't going to make it this time.* The thought took the heat out of the brassy clubbing sun; put a hint of darkness over the blistering rock and baked earth that made this godforsaken land. *This time we won't make it.*

He checked the dust again. It would be there by night. He saw Red Stockstill again, couldn't avoid seeing him, and the bitter thought coursed through him. *You big, worthless worm-souled bastard, I hope he gets you.* He wouldn't, though. Red would save a bullet

to insure that Mangas never got his hands on him.

There was always one like Red around. And one like Mangas. A great brute of an Apache, Mangas; six feet and four inches, a great barrel of a giant's body perched on thick short bandy legs and with an ugly gargoyle face. Wild as any animal or any Apache, but basically an easy-going sort who wound up quietly enough on the Agency, and stayed quiet as long as he could go hunting once in a while and go on his *tiswin* drunk once a year.

Red Stockstill and his partner Oscar Braikle were miners; by opportunity, not trade. They didn't find the lode, or even a good strike, and unrewarding labor palled soon enough. They'd raveled out their slight rope of patience when Mangas—who wasn't Mangas then, but an unpronounceable series of chuckling grunts—came slouching into their camp to beg tobacco. They said afterward he was stealing grub. Anyway, they wrestled him down and tied him to a tree bole, and they flayed him with a bullwhip until they were both tired of it. He was still hanging in his bonds on the tree when they packed up and pulled out.

Nobody ever saw the scars on Mangas's back. He wore a red shirt—always a red shirt and no other color. And he wasn't a reservation buck any more. Some said his beating addled his head; but if it did, it was single-track addled. He lived to kill white men. Or white women or white children—or, for that matter, anything that wasn't Apache. Mexican freighters, tending their strings with one eye for their mules and one cocked for Mangas Colorados, crossed themselves absently and said the fat he fried out of his victims was ointment for his flayed back. If it was,

his wounds were never soothed to healing.

The idea began to come to Lucey as the long day slowly wore out its time.

It was cat-and-mouse, now; the Apaches never quite letting up, but never quite making a rush of it; a constant probing at the perimeter, and the carbines lashing at shadow-targets while the troopers took the pounding of the late hot sun on their backs.

They all knew for sure it was Mangas, now. Half a dozen had seen him.

The flats. Half a mile, more or less. But the gantlet of the canyon put it as far away as the moon. Apaches were infantry. Out in the open, cavalry could, with superior mobility and firepower, maneuver almost at will. Nobody knew that better than Mangas. That was why he'd made a beacon of the burning Fraley ranch, why he'd let the patrol, and finally the troop, through the canyon. Mangas had even split his force, sent the horses on, at least, to make the dust leading out and away from Fraley's. Good bait. He'd caught Captain Lynch, who was an old hand.

Lucey grunted and went back, now, the idea still vaguely forming. *It'll have to go just so*, he thought. *There's only six horses.*

He reported the dust to the lieutenant, waited for him to thumb mentally through the book for the answer. There was only one answer to it now, come daylight, and Mangas with help. It was dusky enough now that the flashes showed every shot. If they didn't try now, they'd wait for morning, for Mangas or any other Apache knew that a man killed at night wandered through eternal darkness.

He gave the lieutenant his opinion, and saw Red Stockstill close enough, by the cluster of boulders where two troopers held the horses. The lieutenant chewed his lip while he thought, and Lucey said a little too loudly and roughly:

"You can make up your mind, or wait for him to come butcher you in the morning."

Marker put his shocked stiff stare on him and said sharply, "That's enough. You've made your report."

Lucey snorted in supreme contempt and scuffed over to the horses. He hunkered down in abused silence, and jabbed at the flinty earth with a stick. He raised his head once at a scattering of reports, and looked up at Stockstill.

"Army," he said bitterly. "They send a wet-eared pup out here with brass on his blouse, and he knows it all. Read it in a book. He's goin' to get us all hung over a fire."

"Not me," said Stockstill. He was jittery, but he'd come unfrozen. "Not me," he repeated.

Then Moynihan came over and looked down at them coldly. "We'll move out at midnight," he said. He added flatly, "The lieutenant is takin' your horse for the wounded. Rest of us will foot it."

Lucey said nothing, and Moynihan kept that look on him that was half outrage and half wonder, and finally gave up and went away.

Lucey jabbed with the stick, again, and then said without looking at Stockstill. "They'll make noise enough to cover. They'll pull the devils off this end."

There was a sudden break in Stockstill's breathing, and Lucey said with a surly half-defiance, "It's my horse, not the Army's. Reckon I'd just as soon

it was me ridin' him as an Army fool."

He could almost feel Stockstill turning it over cautiously in his mind.

"Never make it," he said finally. "He'd never pull 'em all in."

"One man—or two—could," Lucey insisted. "By casin' out where they ain't expectin'. I ain't no yellow-leg clodhopper to fall over my own feet. An' give me twenty minutes in the clear and there ain't no 'Pache buck in the Territory goin' to fade me."

"You're crazy," said Stockstill without conviction.

"Mebbe," said Lucey. "But I'm goin' to be right over there in that clump of rock at midnight. You do what you damn please."

The moon was a day past full, and its brilliance was a curse. Its white glare made shadows all the blacker, and nothing moved without its telltale ink-blot shade writhing long and short, attention-compelling as a flag. By midnight, though, the moon had wheeled across into westering, and the canyon was a fathomless pit athwart the land.

There was one bad part. The horse-holding trooper had got the word, and adamantly refused Lucey his horse. Lucey gave it up and drifted across the pocket and into the rocks, black as the pit, now.

Mangas was taking no chances. The night was alive out there with the twittering and chirping of their signals. Some of them even had fires, but back, out of range, and someone was tunking a drum far downwind.

He heard Stockstill coming, and when the man was close, he whispered irritably, "Pick up your feet, man."

Stockstill grunted, and then his querulous whisper came back. "We can't do it without horses."

Lucey put his shrug in his voice. Even at arm's length, Stockstill was only a faint movement in the blackness. "Suit yourself. I'm moving out now." He turned softly, and caught Stockstill's following movement within moments.

He caught the billygoat smell of the buck before he could hear or see him, and he went to his knees and brought the knife around at the full sweep of his arm. The buck squalled as the edge bit, and Lucey sliced again and came to his feet and let his moccasins slap without heed to noise.

"Run, dammit," he hissed, and took three long sliding steps. He went flat at the base of a hulking rock, dragged himself under the bellied overhang. He heard the *slurt-shup* of Stockstill's running feet and, more suddenly than he'd really expected, a gasping agonized grunt from the man—then the soft whispering prow of moccasins. He caught the smell again; smoke and rank meat and body grease and buckskin soaked with sweat. He came to his knees in one smooth motion and lunged with the blade straight ahead. The buck took it just under the ribs close to the spine, with no more than a gusty grunt, and came down like a sack of potatoes.

Time enough, he thought, and dragged the pistol out of the dog-leg pouch across his belly. He fired one shot into the body before him and another at random down the way Stockstill had gone, took two running strides and fired again. Then he got the hell out of there.

Moynihan sent the order down the line: "No talking. No firing, not even if he's right at the end of your arm. Keep your interval—and goddamit, pick

up your feet!" He went from man to man, dim shapes in the dark, whispering it in a vicious snarl. The wounded were mounted and lashed there. The rest of them walked.

Moynihan went back to the head of the file. "Ready," he said.

Lieutenant Marker whispered back, "Lucey?"

Moynihan's blistering whisper carried every horrific syllable he'd learned in twenty years' service. Then up the canyon a hand gun blasted twice, then once again.

There was a ringing silence on the heels of that, and then movement, up on the rim. Twice Moynihan saw shadows, held his fire with iron discipline. The shadows were heading toward the shots. Then a voice came out of the dark almost at his elbow, and Lucey said mildly:

"Shall I take the point, Moynihan?"

It was a moment before the Irishman could speak and then he said, "Just past the lieutenant, Lucey."

They couldn't do it without a little noise, even with the animal's hoofs wrapped in torn tunics. But they made it. Twice they were shot at; and half a dozen times arrows came blindly into the darkness with their vicious ripping swish. But the big noise was behind them.

A man was screaming back there, and the animal yapping of the Apaches came above that. Lieutenant Marker ran at a shambling trot to catch Lucey, and dragged at his arm with a clawing hand.

"God's name, man," he cried in a strangled whisper, "who's that?"

"Stockstill," Lucey said quietly. "Let go my arm, Lieutenant."

"You mean you left him—back there?" Marker cried in unbelief.

"They had him when I left," the scout returned imperturbably. Then his voice had the harsh whip of driven sand in it.

"How would you have done it, Lieutenant? Think we'd be walkin' out of here without something kept 'em busy back yonder? And if it makes you sick at your belly, think of them Fraley kids and their mother—or Captain Lynch."

"But, good Lord!"

"How would you have done it, Lieutenant?" Lucey demanded again. He

shrugged Marker's hand off his arm and melted away in the dark. The file whispered its motion behind him, walking in the deathly saving shadow. In the flats, they'd make it. Six old hands mounted could escort the rest of them to the very gates of hell—and make Mangas Colorados like it.

The lieutenant would get over it, maybe. He'd learn about war that wasn't in the book. If he lived long enough to get to the flats. Lucey figured they all would make it, now. He walked softly.

COWBOY SLANGUAGE

A Rhymed Quiz by S. Omar Barber

*Our language is rich in the salty words
Of Western cowboys and their herds.
Here are a few. Just take your time,
And fill in the blanks with words that rhyme.*

(Answers on page 140).

1. On all them old trail-drivin' trips,
Cooks built their fires with dry cow — .
2. A steer, that's as wild as a wolf from Reno,
On the range is called an ol' — .
3. A secluded cover in the West is known
By its Spanish name, pronounced — .
4. There's a certain meat — may the Lord excuse 'em —
That a hep of cowpokes call sow — .
5. On western mesa, hill, and valley,
The saddle-horn turn of a rope's a — .
6. A New Mexico cowboy's "life of Riley"
Is dancin' at what he calls a — .
7. A buckin' horse that busts his blister,
Them cowboys call an ol' gut — .
8. That ol' feed bag for the cowboy's pal
Is called by its Spanish name, — .
9. A style of ridin' bronc peelers scorn
Is grabbin' aholt of the apple — .
10. The big gray wolf, once a rangeland hobo,
Though scarce these days, is still a — .



RING and a HAT

*The long rider wanted to retire—
after he met brown-skinned Tanasi.*

By RILEY MARTIN as told to HAROLD PREECE

SIX feet of water separated me from Indian Territory. Six shots from the Kansas posse on the Cimarron River bank barely missed my skull, but sent my brand-new black Stetson sailing toward the opposite shore.

My pony swerved through a protecting clump of reeds toward sanctuary. The minute his hoofs touched dry land, I jumped from the saddle and picked up the hat that had saved my brains from being scattered like pussy-willow fuzz.

I ran five fingers through five holes in the crown. Fifteen dollars and forty cents, that hat had cost me at the best store in Dodge. A week's wear—and lead rips it. All because a little cornhusker constable recognizes me from that yapping reward poster as the buckie who stopped the Topeka express.

I heard hoofbeats behind me, and wheeled around, drawing my .45. Then recognition stayed my trigger.

There'd been a time when that tall, chunky fellow with the welcoming grin had run me harder than any Jay-hawker posse. Now by the spin of fate, we met in the common fraternity of the hunted.

I shook hands with Bob Dalton, the former marshal who'd turned outlaw. "Howdy, Riley," he greeted me. "Heard the shooting. Thought those clod wranglers had jumped my brothers, Grat and Emmett, while they were scouting the other side of the Cimarron."

"Howdy, Bob," I answered, grinning. "Still got that warrant for me?"

"There's six warrants out on me for every one ordering your arrest," Bob laughed. "Funny thing what time does to men, Riley. A few years ago, I had a place all ready to lock you up. Now I can offer you a place to hole up—in the Creek Nation."

I turned my horse to go. "Much obliged, Bob," I said, "but there's one

more river I've got to cross. That's Red River. I'm home bound for Texas—"

"If Heck Thomas doesn't flush you on the way," Bob interrupted. "Travel to Texas has slowed up considerably since he got to be the federal marshal in Muskogee."

I flicked my quirt impatiently. "Heck Thomas doesn't know me from Adam. I've never boarded any engines in Indian Territory."

"Heck Thomas knows everybody," Bob retorted. "And you'll be facing something worse than twenty years for train robbery if he spots you. Reckon you don't remember plugging Sut Nixon in that little petticoat scrape over Belle Starr's daughter."

A healthy regard for my neck made me realize Bob was right. Killing Sut Nixon had meant no more to me than potting a jack rabbit. But Riley Martin couldn't roam this territory freely like Bob Dalton. He'd been raised here, while I had to scan every bush for a marshal when I crossed it.

"You win, Bob," I conceded. "Show me where to roost."

Bob led me over roundabout trails to the Creek Nation. After a three-day ride, he installed me in a lean-to built against some high rocks at the bottom of a deep canyon. I hobbled my horse and hung up my hat before settling down to the loneliest two months since I'd roistered up to Wyoming to learn engine boarding from Harry Longbaugh, "the Sundance Kid."

I had had all any man can stand of varmints for neighbors, that August night when I heard Indian tom-toms throbbing in the hills. The dry, dusty leaves started swaying under the pompous, rolling boom. The coyotes turned down their whining dirge to shamed little yelps as great peacocks soared like

the thunders of judgment across mountains and valleys. I concluded that the drums were summoning the tribe to the Green Corn Dance—the annual festival that begins the Creek New Year.

I tried not to listen. Yet even the rocks were hearing, and bouncing to the heavy vibrations of the drums. I crawled in the lean-to. No sooner had I lain down on my bed of boughs than the hut's ramshackle wooden sides were humming with reverberations that made my blood pound. The chords lowered to a deliberate, insinuating beat that drew me out of the shanty, toward the canyon's exit. I hesitated a minute, then walked a few yards down the path leading to the world outside.

For a minute, I stood there, feeling like a man who's just slipped out of jail. The tom-toms rose in an insistent beat and, to this day, I've never recalled what happened next. But an hour later, I found myself pulling up at the clearing where the Creeks were gathered.

A squaw greeted me with a bowl of stewed venison after I'd dismounted and staked my horse. The drummers at the opposite side of the clearing rippled out a teasing salvo on their instruments.

A girl stepped from a deerskin medicine lodge to the center of the space. Her skin was of a lighter brown than that of most Indians. It was easy to see that some strain of white was mixed with red in her family line, and, that not too many generations ago.

Wild summer flowers were twined with bright store-bought ribbons in her long black braids. From her slim, bare shoulders hung a hand-woven native blanket with more colors than a Joseph's coat. In her left hand she grasped twelve

plain sticks, in her right hand twelve painted ones.

The bowl slid from my hands untasted. "Prettiest woman I ever saw," I murmured. "Prettier than any dance-hall girl I ever swung in a fandango at Dodge."

The girl bent down and divided the plain sticks into four piles of three each—one pile for each season of the year, one stick for each month. Afterward, she arranged the painted sticks criss-cross, so that one pointed in each of the earth's four directions.

Her ceremonial chore finished, she stood up and faced the crowd gathered under the sputtering, kerosene-soaked pine torches. Then she caught sight of me.

She came forward and took my hand. "The women choose partners for the first dance," I heard her saying in English that suggested she'd been to mission school. "I choose you. Your name?"

"Riley Martin," I answered. "Yours?"

"Tanasi, in the Creek tongue. Mary Jackson, on the Indian agency rolls."

"I'll call you Tanasi." My lips puckered with disgust at the common name the Indian agency had pinned on her. Labeling a woman with her looks Mary Jackson! It was bad as dressing a queen in shabby gingham.

The drums rumbled commandingly. The dancers bowed to the east where the sun rises to make fruitful the grain, and to the west where it rests from its labors. Tanasi's body was ripe, like a field waiting to be harvested as it swayed and shuffled.

At midnight, the Green Corn Dance began dwindling into the more intimate rites of couples seeking the sheltering brush. Tanasi led me to a little grove enclosing a sward of grass dried

to brittle softness by the August heat. She undraped the blanket from her shoulders and laid it on the turf. Her hand reached up to lift my hat from my head.

"Such a nice hat," she commented. "Who put those holes in it?"

I don't know what made me tell her the truth. Always in my dealings with women, I'd been as close-mouthed as I'd have been with any deputy who might get inquisitive. Even with Belle Starr's daughter, who'd shared my bunk whenever I'd denned up with her mother's bunch at that outlaw stronghold of Younger's Bend. But I found myself telling this Indian girl about my little brush with the Kansans, and the holdup of the Topeka express that had set off the chase. Except, for reasons a little too personal, I didn't mention that Heck Thomas was scouting for me on this side of the Cimarron.

I waited to hear her comment on my confession of outlawry. Her tongue was still, but her fingers began fumbling in a worried way with the hat. I saw that her nails had added their own tiny dents to the clefts left in the Stetson by Jayhawker bullets. It flustered me. She was the first Indian woman I'd ever seen upset by a few mementos of gunshot.

"What is it, Tanasi?" I asked. "Do bullet holes make you remember something you want to forget? A man, maybe—?"

She stopped me with a fierce little cry and a silencing hand on my prying lips. I seized her wrists. The pounding throb of her arteries told me not to waste the night in words.

I bent over to kiss her. The Stetson fell from her hand. The blanket rustled impatiently.

The sun awakened me, the next morning. The sun and one round breast, nestling in the pit of my shoulder. The rise and swell of that soft, brown mound told me that I wanted no more of scorpions for bedmates. Marshals or no marshals, I meant to keep Tanasi. After I'd roused her, she mentioned an unoccupied cabin that belonged to some of her kin. Then I knew she meant to keep me.

We walked back to the clearing. I untied my horse and lifted her to share my saddle. Before noon, the cabin had new tenants. Three nights later, we were married in a tribal ceremony under its roof, with a few Creeks for witnesses.

After they left, I reached in my pocket and handed her a hundred-dollar bill. "This is my wedding gift to you," I said, "though I wish it were something pretty that you could put away and keep."

A little blaze kindled in her eyes. She tossed the bill on the floor and ground it under her heel. "No man can buy me for money," she said angrily. "And money is not the gift I want from my husband."

"What do you want, Tanasi?" I asked, thinking she would say a set of combs I might buy from some pack peddler, or a bolt of ribbon I could get at the general store a couple of miles off.

"I want a ring," she answered firmly. "A wedding ring like white girls wear when they get married."

I turned her off with a halfway promise. It wasn't that I'd never heard of a wedding ring ever figuring in any ceremony performed according to Indian rites. Nor did I begrudge her any trinket she wanted.

But, as it happened, the nearest place

to buy a ring was Muskogee, where Heck Thomas had his headquarters.

I forgot the matter as I busied myself with a fall garden to feed us. The autumn sun warmed the beds where I sowed, and a handsome woman the bed where I slept. I was prouder of my turnip crop than of all the hauls I'd ever made.

Snow and the calendar announced December. I started wondering what pretty gift I could get Tanasi for the day of gifts that was coming. Some frilly lace from a pack peddler. Or a whole big jar of taffy candy from the general store.

A week before Christmas, Bob Dalton stopped by for supper. It was the first time I'd seen him since he'd met me in private and bawled me out for deserting the hideaway. After the meal, Bob leaned back in his chair and lit a pipe.

"My brothers have spotted a couple of banks at Coffeyville, Kansas," he announced. "Right across the street from each other. It'll be easy to crack both of 'em at once."

He looked at me knowingly. "Maybe six months, Riley. Maybe a year before we call on the Jayhawk bankers. But we'll be needing a man who's cool on the trigger and hot in the stirrup when we do."

Tanasi flashed me a glance that was both warning and veto.

"Getting a little bit ambitious, aren't you, Bob?" I asked. "Your cousin, Cole Younger, never tackled but one bank when he pulled that Northfield raid that landed him in the Minnesota pen."

I shook my head. "Nope, Bob. You did too good a job of persuading me to stay in Indian Territory. I'm through with Kansas. You might as well know that I'm through with long riding."

Bob's jaw dropped in disappointment. His hands were shaking a little when he knocked the ashes from his pipe.

"If you're out of the game, Riley," he acknowledged, "you're out. I'd have been out too if my girl, Eugenia Moore, had lived. She died wearing my ring."

Tanasi's face turned a deeper brown. She said nothing while Bob was there. But the minute he left, she brought up the subject I'd hoped was closed.

"Bob bought his girl a ring," she remarked, a tinge of acid in her voice. "Too bad I'm not white—like Eugenia Moore."

Her words hit me hard. "Do you think a ring will be a guarantee?" I inquired. "A guarantee that I won't leave you, like so many Texans who marry Indian girls, only to pull out when the marshals make them hit the home trail?"

Stony Indian silence was my answer. "As your father did your mother?" I persisted.

Still no reply.

"Who was your father?" I demanded.

"Tex Jackson," she said, wincing at the sound of the name. "I never saw him. The posse shot him at the Texas line, two months before I was born."

Then I knew what the bullet holes in my hat had recalled to her, that night of the Green Corn Dance. I sank into a chair and nervously rolled a smoke.

"All right, Tanasi," I said after a few thoughtful puffs. "If it takes a ring to prove myself, you'll get the ring. We'll head for Muskogee tomorrow."

The way her face lighted up was worth all the jewelry rings in the five Indian Nations.

I'd picked up several swift ponies

by trading around among the Creeks' Before daylight, the next morning, I saddled one for Tanasi and another for myself. We made the fifty miles in a rapid ride and arrived in Muskogee around noon. I meant to finish my business quick—the ring for Tanasi, a new hat for myself—then back to our cabin.

Numbers made me feel more secure when I saw the crowd of Christmas shoppers that had converged on the little town from all over the Creek Nation. *Nobody liable to pick me out in this mob of Indian and nesters, I thought. But best take no chances. Best to keep a sharp eye out for lawmen.*

None paid us much mind, though, as we rode down the straggling main street. We reined up before the one jewelry store in the Creek Nation. Tanasi sat in a rapt trance gazing at the gleaming exhibit of rings in one of the twin windows. Then she veered her horse a few inches from mine to view the gems in the opposite windows. My eyes were following her, sharing her pleasure.

For five full minutes, my mind was occupied with rings. I don't know what caused my thoughts to stray away from baubles at the end of that time. But something looming up in the back of my brain told me that I was being watched.

I turned my head slowly. Then I saw the hard-faced man who stood measuring me with hawk eyes from the sidewalk. He sauntered over and stood directly in front of me.

My eyes were riveted on the big star pinned to his jacket. His cold, appraising stare was fixed on the bullet dents in my hat.

Then we two knew each other, although this was our first meeting.

Heck Thomas, the famous hunter, and Riley Martin, prominent among the hunted, needed no formal introductions.

The marshal's hand slid to the butt of his huge Colt. Any other time, I'd have tested his draw and beat him to it. Now I was whipped before I started. For a gunfight might mean a stray shot hitting Tanasi.

Heck Thomas drew his gun, and I was covered. Simultaneously, Tanasi turned to point out a ring that pleased her. "It's that one, Riley," she indicated; "the one with the four diamonds."

She saw the gun pointed my way. Thomas edged toward me. The cold steel of his heavy pistol shone with a luster that paled any geegaw in the windows. Then Tanasi swerved her horse toward mine.

Pony to pony, shoulder to shoulder, she was by my side. Her hand reached out and grasped mine. Her look challenged the man meaning to cap his career by bringing in a celebrated gunman and train robber named Riley Martin.

Heck Thomas stepped back a pace. He stood for a minute gaping at the girl, keeping a corner of his eye fixed on me. Tanasi's face never wavered from his. Hardness for hardness, boldness for boldness, her gaze matched the marshal's.

For a few seconds, the lawman stood there trying to make up his mind. His forefinger scratched his chin in an annoyed way. Then, frowning slightly, he replaced the gun in its holster.

His hand rose to the brim of his big Stetson. He tipped the hat to Tanasi. Wedged in my saddle, I watched him turn and walk down the street in a savage, baffled stride.

We spurred our horses and left

Muskogee in a flying gallop. Five hours, it had taken us to come. A little more than three hours saw us home. Tanasi's face was hurt surprise for my not confiding in her. She had no word of reproach when we lit down, but her look told me that she realized everything.

From this hour, I made sure that a horse stood saddled and bridled in the stable day and night. Heck Thomas was to be admired for backing down as he had in Muskogee. I'd have been as gallant if I'd had the drop on a lawman who was with a woman. But chivalry was no rule of trigger when ladies were absent. It was nothing I could count on to stay the posse that would be forming. For Heck Thomas located a trail by a man or a man by a trail. And never a man, never a trail had he been known to lose.

It was either pull leather for Texas or pull hemp in Indian Territory. My dallyings with Belle Starr's daughter hadn't made me tarry, once the marshals had set me flying for killing Sut Nixon. But these four months with Tanasi made me feel that going back to my old home or my old trade of engine-boarding was on a par with going back to knee breeches.

Two days passed. Nights I reaped Tanasi's willing flesh as if it were my last time to satisfy my man-quest. Mornings I noticed that she reeled with dizzy spells that had started a week or so before we'd ridden for the ring. I put them all down, however, to her fears for me.

You can't leave her when she's so upset, I reasoned. If you do saddle up and pull out, how can you make her believe that you're any better than her father? That sorry rascal who left without ever seeing his own child?

My jaw set firm. She'd stood up to

face danger with me in Muskogee. She hadn't run like many a woman would have when she saw a gun cocked and a man trapped.

My mind was made up. I wasn't running either. Here I was staying. Staying with my woman till there was no choice except going down before a salvo of lead or a swath of hemp.

But three days were left till Christmas. I was gloomily turning the pages of a patent-medicine almanac when my ear caught the faint echo of hoofs.

I dropped the almanac. Tanasi stiffened in alarm. I hurriedly drew my Colt and crouched by the window, ready for trouble. The hoofbeats grew louder. A few minutes later, five men whose horses dripped sweat reined up at the gate.

I lowered the gun when I recognized the three Dalton brothers and two Indians who belonged to Tanasi's Creek clan. Tanasi was right behind me when I plunged through the door.

"Better hit the saddle, Riley!" Bob Dalton shouted. "The Creeks here have just sighted Heck Thomas and a big bunch over by Bald Knob. Means the posse has struck your trail. We're taking no chances on their nabbing us, too."

I jammed three bullets in the gun. "I'm not running," I declared. "I'll fight it out here in my home—"

Tanasi grabbed my shoulder. "You'll have to go, Riley," she said. "You'll have to ride for it. You wouldn't have a chance staying here and shooting it out."

She ran into the house. A moment later she came out, holding my shot-scarred hat. She tossed it to me, then dashed toward the stable. She returned in a second, leading two fleet ponies. The sound of hoofs, followed by a

boisterous wave of voices, came from the direction of Bald Knob. The Daltons stirred in panic.

"Wait, boys!" Tanasi called. "A hat betrayed Riley once. Hats may save him, this time. Hand me your Stetsons."

The men threw her their hats. She jammed them one on another till they formed a compact stack. Oncoming hoofs and voices soared till their noisy clamor equalled the roar of the drums in the Green Corn Dance. The Daltons and their Creek henchmen jumped in their saddles, then scattered like wild turkeys.

Tanasi and I sprang on our ponies. The two horses leaped forward and cleared the cabin fence as the posse rounded a road bend a few hundred yards from the cabin. Tanasi's horse forged ahead into a deep wood. The possemen didn't see her, but they spotted me. "There's Martin!" somebody yelled. "Get him and then we'll round up the Daltons."

I turned and fired once. A volley from the possemen's guns whizzed past my ears. Shattered twigs fell on my saddle as my pony tore into the wood and caught up with Tanasi's.

She lit down for a second. She placed Bob Dalton's hat on a stump then climbed back on her pony. Two minutes later, we heard the horses of the possemen charging through the thicket. Clear above the commotion of men and horses arose a commanding voice that could belong to nobody else but Heck Thomas.

"Slow up, men. There may be a man under that hat. Riley Martin's the smartest fox since Jesse James, and full of tricks like Old Jess."

Tanasi and I prodded our horses to gain an extra hundred yards. Fifteen

seconds later, we heard an explosion of guns followed by a blast of curses. Only pieces of fuzz and not the bleeding flesh of an outlaw had rewarded the marksmanship of Heck Thomas's crack-shooting possemen.

"That slowed them up some," Tanasi said after the sound of gunshot had dissolved into the sharp cries of frightened birds. "This will give you a little more start on them."

She placed the second hat on a big boulder. We'd barely pulled away before I heard the crack of lead against rock and looked up to see the Stetson bobbing like an unstrung kite in the air. We were two hundred yards from the posse, and still sheltered by timber, when she deposited the third one on a chinaberry sapling. Two minutes later, there thundered a barrage whose vibrations shook leaves from the trees.

Tanasi laid the fourth hat in a clump of ferns. The possemen's guns boomed out like cannons as we spurred on to put more distance between us and the human pack baying behind. She placed the fifth hat on a rotten, overturned cask that had probably been dumped by some Indian Territory whisky runner. From there to a little knoll ahead, stretched a clear trail trodden out by the hoofs of goats and cattle.

We rode furiously toward the knoll. When we reached it, Tanasi had but one hat left. My own tattered skypiece.

She climbed down from the horse and held the hat for a long minute. She ran her fingers through its jagged holes. When she finally placed it on a brush heap, a few hundred yards down the trail, I saw that the crown bore nail prints that were fresh and new.

She remounted and rode back to me. "The last hat," she said. "Our last minute together."

She swayed in one of those sudden giddy spells. I reached out a hand to steady her. She sat erect and her face had the troubled look it had borne that night when I'd admitted my trade. That night of the Green Corn Dance—

"Five months together, Riley," she said. "Twenty weeks. Such a little time. But twice as long as my mother had with my father."

I put my arms around her. Her hands cupped my cheeks in a grasp that made my blood surge like the last crest of a flood resisting its ebb.

"Ride to Texas with me, Tanasi," I said desperately. "I can never come back to Indian Territory. But my gun has never slipped where I'm going. Texas is good country, where we can be good people."

She ran her fingers gropingly across my brow and let them rest for a second on my lips. Then she shook her head and pulled her pony back a few feet from mine.

"Why not, Tanasi?" I asked. "Why not?"

Her face was a tight brown mask. I grabbed the reins of her horse, intending to drag him along after mine. With a lithe motion of her hands, she regained control of the reins.

"No, Riley," she said. "A woman carrying a baby can't ride two hundred miles of rough trails. Not unless she wants to lose the baby."

My boot heels jabbed so deeply into my horse's flanks that he nearly bolted off. I pulled him up sharply and stared at Tanasi. Now I understood, if too late, what had caused all that dizziness of hers.

"I'll not leave you, Tanasi," I said brokenly. "I'll stay here and take care of you and the baby. Here in the Territory. I've stopped long riding. I'll ask for a pardon. I'll—"

The shake of her head spoke louder than the wildblurtings of my tongue.

"My father was shot before his child was born," she said. "They'll shoot or hang you if you stay. And before the baby comes."

I tried to say something, but the words jammed on my tongue like shells in a rusted barrel. Slumped there in my saddle, I knew how Tex Jackson had felt on another morning when he'd ridden away with bullets screaming behind him. He and I and all the other Texans who'd stopped between posses to sow their seed in the sweet flesh of Indian women.

I seized Tanasi's hand, wanting to delay, if but for a minute, the parting. It seemed to me, as a flock of indifferent sparrows winged by, that I'd never loved her more. She leaned forward and kissed me once.

"Good-by, Riley," she said in words that were taut like a cord ready to snap. "Don't lose any time getting back to Texas—and home."

She slapped her pony's haunches and galloped away. I sat in a stupor, watching her till she disappeared around a little peak. And when my straining eyes could glimpse her no further, I bowed my head, trying to shape in my mind some image of that baby I'd never see.

Boy or girl, I was wondering what it would be, when I heard the roar of shots down the trail. The gunfire yanked me out of my daze. Heck Thomas and his bunch had squared accounts with the fifth hat. They wouldn't wait for a birth announcement before heading for the sixth and last one.

With quirt and spur, I laid on to my horse. He sailed past my hat and down the trail. I turned into a dense thicket, only to find myself stopped by a dense

wall of tall brambles. The oncoming hoofbeats grew louder and louder. From my place of concealment, I saw the posse rein up twenty yards from the sixth hat and cautiously dismount.

"This damn-fool trick is making me puke," somebody bawled. "I rode out to plug bandits and share in a reward. The Daltons have got clean away. Now Riley Martin's making jackasses out of us with this hat business and getting miles away while we fall for it."

"Shut up, Jeff!" Heck Thomas barked in reply. "I'm taking no chances with Martin. This hat's his, whoever the others belonged to. It's the one he was wearing that day I saw him with that half-breed girl. And it's more likely than the others to mark the spot where he's lit down to make a stand."

The marshal raised his hand. "Aim! Shoot."

A dozen shots from the possemen completed the job that the Jayhawkers had started on my hat. It soared aloft to land in a thousand shards of felt on weeds and bushes. Heck Thomas and his men waited an impatient moment for some sign that Riley Martin had stopped to do battle. Then, with rumbling curses, they spurred their horses down the trail.

I'll wait till they come abreast of me, I thought. Then I'll open fire on them from the thicket. It'll mean my life, too, when they spot me. But if it's my time to die, let it be because of my wife and my baby.

I checked the magazine to see that the gun had its full six shots. "A dozen of them and one of me," I said. "But half of them will get it before they finish me. And Heck Thomas will be the first."

The posse advanced within twenty-five yards of my hiding-place. Twenty

yards—and then ten. I raised my gun and drew a clear bead on the marshal's heart. I leveled the pistol straight. Then my finger became paralyzed with numbness as I tried to press the trigger. Heck Thomas had spared me in Muskogee. Whatever his reason, he'd spared me. I couldn't kill him now in cold blood from ambush.

The air was thick with hoof dust when the posse came abreast of me. In that split second, I aimed at another lawman. But my gun dropped into the holster as it was poised to fire. As the posse swept by, I knew that nothing had happened to my shooting skill.

But it was my will that no longer harmonized with my trigger. Hard sense told me I'd never slay another man. That was as certain as that I'd never return to Indian Territory.

I waited five minutes till the posse had disappeared down the trail on a scent they'd find out soon enough was a cold one. Then I gave my horse the rein. He galloped straight across country for two miles till I struck the path that was the first in the network of backways leading me home.

For three days and nights I rode without stopping, except for an occasional halt to rest my pony. It was late Christmas Day of 1892 when I forded icy Red River into Texas. But now home ground seemed alien ground under my boots. And never was a Christmas dinner more tasteless than the

jack rabbit I shot and broiled on a forked stick.

Two months after I'd crossed, word came that Bob and Grat Dalton had been slaughtered by the swarming Jayhawkers of Coffeyville while trying to rob those two banks at once.

I left the ranch where I'd hired out as a cowpuncher. Then I rode back to Red River.

From the Texas side, I looked over toward Indian Territory. Nothing stirred there but a few nesters picking late cotton on broken-up rangeland that had once teemed with cattle.

I stood there for a minute recalling men I'd pardnered with on soil where the yield was changing with the people. Bob and Grat Dalton—Dick Broadwell and Charlie Powers—a score of others I'd known as crack shots and game fellows. But dead because time, surer than posses, stalks the hunted.

And save for God's grace and a woman's wit, Riley Martin might be riding hell with them.

I drew my gun and fired one shot into the air. One last salute for the old boys and the old days.

But louder than that blast, I heard something in my mind. Something that still sets my limbs throbbing, these sixty years since.

For a minute, I heard the rumble of a drum—the faint rustle of a blanket.

Oh, Tanasi!

Answers to "Cowboy Slangage" Quiz on page 130

- | | |
|------------|-------------|
| 1. Chips. | 6. Baile. |
| 2. Ladino. | 7. Twister. |
| 3. Rincon. | 8. Morral. |
| 4. Boozum. | 9. Horn. |
| 5. Dally. | 10. Lobo. |

STOP BURNING YOUR MONEY



Don't let the tobacco habit burn a hole in your pay packet! Stop smoking the sure way - the easy way - with APAL, an imitation cigarette that you never light. Its clean soothing taste kills the tobacco craving at once. No strained nerves! No frayed tempers! It's a pleasure to stop smoking (and start saving) with APAL!

READ WHAT **APAL** USERS SAY

Regd. Trade Mark

Dear Sirs,—I received my APAL more than two years ago. When it arrived I did not use it for some time, then one day I thought well I paid for it let's have a go. At that time I was smoking 40 cigarettes a day. I put the APAL in my mouth, and I have never smoked since. To me it seemed a miracle. To sum up, I am feeling good, I can take the children out for a day instead of telling them we cannot afford it, and generally I always have a few shillings in my pocket instead of being permanently broke.
J.K., Lelston

Dear Sirs,—I thought I would write. I received my APAL some months ago, my family and I have STOPPED SMOKING, so I say thank you.
E.R., Wilsden

Dear Sirs,—I have never had more pleasure in writing a letter than this one. I started using the APAL the day it arrived, and have not touched a cigarette since. I smoked about 20 cigarettes a day for more than 20 years. I cannot speak too highly of your APAL. I bless the day I sent for an APAL. J.D., Portsmouth

Dear Sirs,—About two months ago I sent for an APAL. I found it truly remarkable, I gave up smoking without any discomfort and a longing for a smoke. I am truly grateful.
Mrs. M.C., Kent

Dear Sirs,—It is now almost twelve months since I got an APAL, although I was a chain smoker until the APAL arrived. I have not had the slightest inclination to take up smoking since I got my APAL.
Mrs. E.K., Dublin

Dear Sirs,—Some little time ago I sent for three APALS, for my wife, daughter and self. I was not very popular for doing this, however, since they arrived between us we have saved over £7 on cigarettes. We have completely conquered the cigarette habit. Had this state of affairs been prophesied a month ago I would never have believed it.
P.O., Marthen

Dear Sirs,—One week to-morrow I received an APAL. I never thought that such a small insignificant thing could help me, but I can definitely say that it is the finest cure on the market. R.B., Nuneaton

Dear Sirs,—My APAL has been so successful that I have recommended it to several of my friends, so please send one to Mrs. M.T. Mrs. G.B., Lancs.

Dear Sirs,—I purchased an APAL in January and was amazed at its efficiency. I was smoking 45 a day, but now I no longer want to smoke.
M.W., Harrogate

Dear Sirs,—I am sending for an APAL. I have been rather impressed by recommendations received from personal acquaintances of mine. E.E., Ammanford

Dear Sirs,—I wish to thank you for the APAL you sent me some time ago as I have not smoked since. I am sending for one to give a friend.
Mrs. M.Z., Goldicote

Dear Sirs,—It is three months since I purchased my APAL. Two puffs from my APAL and smoking was cured. Thanks again, and again.
L.H., Pewlands Gill

Dear Sirs,—After some delay I wish to report on the success of my APAL. I received it on the 28th February at 08.00 hours and replaced it for a cigarette, and I am happy to say that I have not smoked since. I was a heavy smoker for 10 years.
E.S., Shorncliffe

Dear Sirs,—I received my APAL only eight days ago, and what A PAL, I stopped smoking right away, no more craving; it's wonderful. I have been burning money for 12 years, now I have the pleasure in banking £1 a week—no more morning coughing.
Miss F.J., Bromley

Dear Sirs,—I want two APAL sent air-mail for my friends, who were rather surprised of the marvellous effect it had on me when I stopped smoking two years ago.
E.F., Tanga

Please send stamped, addressed envelope for full particulars, free advice and PROOF!

HEALTH CULTURE ASSOCIATION

(Dept. 45) 245 High Holborn, London, W. C. 1

The Caprock weighs a man by his ability with his fists, so Galligan fixes up a friend in need with a convincing reputation.



Samaritan

By WILL C. BROWN

TOWARD evening the canyon took on moving shadows from gaunt cedars and low churning clouds until all the land seemed crawling with dark legions of hostile men. Galligan called out to them, thickly—"Somebody, I need a little help here." Then, ashamed, he knew fever had set in and resolved to talk no more. There was nobody out there tonight.

It would be all right, though, to whisper to the Big Boss. Just with his mind, not using his tongue. *Big Boss, up there, I'm in a hell of a shape—can You do anything?*

Then he sank back, exhausted. Why would the Big Boss help him? Wasn't he, Chip Galligan, supposed to be a self-sufficient fighter? His fists had whipped them all, including Jim Estep, as a saloonful of spectators could testify. They all said Chip Galligan could whip any man in the Caprock. But now, there was nobody to whip.

Nobody out there tonight, when the air at this altitude would near turn bones to ice. Nobody out there tomorrow, either, when the sun would work on a man all day like a branding iron searing the whole flank of heaven. Nobody anywhere nearer than Jim Estep's cabin, a good five miles across the broken land.

Galligan would be glad to see even Jim Estep now, though Jim was as apt to kill him as help him. He'd beaten Jim up pretty bad in the Caprock saloon. It had been a real pleasure, that

fight. It worked off a lot of resentment between him and Jim Estep.

Maybe it would be as well to take a quick bullet from Estep as to die an inch at a time under a cooking sun, his foot swollen and twisted down in the flintrock gap. This was like an animal caught in a steel trap. The split rock edges bit into his booted foot like a tight vise, and by now he felt the swelling would have to burst his boot.

When he tried to turn his body, each bruise made when he had fallen from his spooked horse set up new and thundering pain. There were so many pains that he was nauseated for a moment. He tried to turn back to his original position. Broken fragments of flintrock cut into him, as if he lay on a bed of knives. But the big hurt, the engulfing black pain above all else, was in that right foot, trapped down in the sharp-lipped rock crevice.

He lay on his side until the stomach sickness passed, head cradled in a throbbing arm. The arm was bleeding in spots from the sharp rock cuts. His breath pained his chest and he doubted if a single rib remained unbroken.

The fall had started on the trail ledge twenty feet above. First, his horse had stumbled, then bucked, and Galligan got his first big fall. He must have been slightly addled, for he remembered groping to his feet, then stepping off into empty darkness. That roll down the steep canyon side, through a meat chopper of flintrock, was an eternity of agony. And when he had stumbled erect again, pain-blinded and butchered, his foot plunged heavily down between the sharp edges of the rock gap and he could not with draw it.

Now that foot was so swollen he knew it would never come out. What Estep or somebody would find some-

day, if the buzzards left anything, would be the twisted remains of something that had died a pain-crazed maniac.

The thought of that was shock enough to clear his mind for a moment. And that was when he remembered his gun. It was still there, one of the lesser pains under his hip, though how it had stayed in holster in that fall was beyond him. Carefully, biting back the groans, he worked it free.

He wouldn't have to die like a trapped coyote now. When the time came—

Somewhere he heard horse hoofs pounding the rocks. Fever again? No—the sounds of the horse came from the trail above. Desperately, unable to control it, fever or not, he yelled into the night. Then he fired the six-gun, three rapid shots, into the air.

Rocks rattled in the darkness above. A voice came down in a guarded call from the rim.

"Galligan? That you down there?"

Jim Estep's voice. Through the ravages of pain, even in the stormy tumult of his agony, he knew that voice. Hope and relief flooded over him, and it was not just the pain that put moisture in his eyes.

"It's me, Jim—my foot's caught in the rocks."

Hard flintrock crunched above unpeering over from the ledge.

"What're you doing down there, Galligan?"

"My horse spooked and threw me. Then I fell. Can you get down here, Jim?"

There was a long wait.

"How do I know this ain't a trick of some kind? You trying to pull something on me?"

"Honest to God—I'm caught like a

coyote, Jim! Feel like every bone's broken. Get down here, man!"

Estep, up in the darkness, spoke reluctantly. "You always been pretty foxy, Galligan. If your mount hadn't come flaggin' down to my place with empty saddle I'd swear you were trying to pull something."

"Nothing like that, Jim," said Chip through set teeth. He had to fight back pain and panic for a moment. Why didn't Estep get on down there? He couldn't keep his consciousness much longer against such suffering. "Could you hurry? It's hurting bad and I've lost some blood."

There was no sound from above. Estep wasn't moving. Then the cautious voice called down hoarsely. "You ain't said what headed you to my place tonight."

Galligan wanted to scream back that they could talk of that later, that every word he had to utter now was against a red-hot sheet of pain. He found his voice, speaking in strain and weariness.

"It was about those cattle, Jim. That twenty head of steers. They showed up today. I wanted to tell you I was sorry I pinned it on you."

And that was the way it had been, too. For the first time since he'd been neighbors to Jim Estep's shoestring spread, Chip Galligan had this night felt moved to go say something decent, something neighborly to Estep. From the first, it seemed like, they'd got off on the wrong foot with each other. Little suspicions, little troubles about boundary lines and water holes and missing cattle. Maybe it was because each of them was struggling so hard to build up his little two-bit one-man outfit.

And Jim Estep was such a nonde-

script, mild kind of a man. Sometimes Chip had halfway resolved to go shake hands with Estep and suggest they call off their arguments, and try to be better neighbors. For little troubles slowly but surely had been building into big trouble. And about then is when he missed those steers, with trail signs pointing across the canyon toward Estep's place. And that, of course, was what brought on the fight when he had viciously accused Jim Estep in the Caprock saloon.

There was genuine puzzlement in Estep's voice, above in the darkness.

"I plain can't figure what you're up to, Chip. Damn it—if it only was daylight, and I could see you—"

Chip moaned. Daylight was an eternity away.

"Like I tell you, I'm bad hurt! I'm going to have gangrene in this foot by morning if you don't get me out of here."

Estep spoke, as if thoughtfully trying to add it up to himself. "You beat hell out of me in the saloon. Sort of got the jump, hit me first when I wasn't expecting it—I never was much for fist fightin', anyhow. Had to fight you, with everybody looking, but I knew I was a goner. Maybe that didn't satisfy you—maybe this is some loco way you schemed up to make me a laughing-stock again."

"I can't stand any more palaver!" Galligan said weakly. "Like I told you, I found those cattle. I'm sorry about that fight. If I live, I'll ride till I tell every human in the Caprock country I was wrong about that. Oughtn't to have beat you up that way—just crazy mad, I guess. Ribs feel like they're poking out my chest—can't talk any—"

"Everybody laughs when they see me." Estep spoke from the darkness,

mildly, without rancor. "Reckon they think I'm a mighty poor fighter, by Caprock standards. Just never been able to put my heart into hurtin' a man, seems."

"You're hurtin' hell out of me now!" Galligan snarled. In a new fit of pain, plus blinding anger, he tried to sit upright. Pain then swamped him; he dizzied and fell back limply. Above, he heard faint sounds of loose flintrocks sliding, then the black world about him flashed with one more red explosion and he drifted into sweet, relieving darkness.

They were somewhere on the trail when consciousness came back to Galligan. At first he sensed only rhythmic discomfort. And then the pain hit all at once, hard, and he had to cry out.

He was doubled over a saddle. The mount stopped. Jim Estep, riding ahead, pulled up immediately and dismounted. He walked back to the lead horse.

"You all right, Galligan?"

He had to try twice, before he could control his voice. "I'm hurtin' pretty bad, Jim. These ribs. Could you maybe sit me up in the saddle?"

Estep worked at that, first having to take Galligan completely off and to the ground, then awkwardly hoisting him back onto the skittish horse. Finally, it was accomplished, and Chip sat, almost doubled forward, hanging onto the saddle horn. The exertions had left him sick again, and he was biting his lips to hold consciousness against the pain.

When they had rested a little, he made out Estep's big figure, for the first time, in the clear moonlight. Estep was trying to roll them each a smoke, and Chip saw the blood on his hands.

"My blood, Jim—or yours?"

"That dang flintrock," Estep said. He fitted a lumpy smoke between Galligan's teeth and fired a light. "Had to dig your foot out with my hands and a gun barrel. That rock cuts like busted bottles. Had to slice your boot to pieces, Chip."

The smoke helped. Chip muttered, "Never mind the boot."

A minute went by. Then Estep flipped the snipe away and said, "Think you can make it the rest of the way, now?"

"If you take it easy. Where we going?"

"Figured on the Caprock saloon. It'll still be open. Doc Tolbert will likely be there, or else they can find him."

Last night they'd been in that saloon there'd been one hell of a fight, Chip thought as they rode along. He peered ahead, at Estep's slouched back, wondering what Estep was thinking about. Estep was the kind of big, slow, unasking man, whose breed seemed to get born just for the purpose of being whipped or pushed around by better men.

Better men? Chip scowled at the thought—something that was not the flintrock cuts seemed to gall him somewhere. Who was there to say that the ilk of Jim Estep wasn't the better men? How come, after all, that the Caprock weighed a man so much by just the way he could and would use his fist or six-gun? Maybe the Caprock had never had a broken ankle caught in flint teeth, with hours to think about the buzzards.

He wondered if Estep had ever won a fight in his life. Maybe the big, slow cowman was having his first real, knock-down, hurtin' fisticuffs the other night in the saloon.

Chip wondered, too, why these things were bothering him. Then he thought of the blood on Jim Estep's hands. More than a little blood. Getting that foot out had been no picnic. Getting him up that steep rock-loose slope must have been tough business, too.

"Jim," he called. He saw the big man turn his head. The midnight moon shone clear and cold, and in the flat below were yellow-tinted houses of Caprock town. "Jim, did I tell you—I found those cattle, want to apologize for ever thinking—"

"Yeah, you told me." Estep turned back, kicking his horse ahead, tugging on the lead reins of Chip's horse.

And before long, the mounts stood at the hitchrack at the Caprock saloon. It was well past midnight, but the Caprock would always contain a few customers till its two-a.m. closing-time.

Limpily, in a haze of semi-consciousness, Chip felt Estep's big arms slide him from the saddle. Estep, carrying him, shouldered into the saloon.

The glare of the hanging lamps made a burning fog, in which he could see suspended here and there the blobs of surprised faces.

He was stretched on the floor, and the barkeep was hurrying forward, rolling a coat into a pillow, and Chip closed his eyes as it was slipped under his head.

"What the hell happened?"

Chip opened his eyes again when somebody said that.

They stood looking down at him, a gawking, open-mouthed circle, the last hard-bitten sediment of the saloon's night of customers. He saw them look at him, then look to Jim Estep, and at Estep's bleeding hands and rock-slash-ed clothes, and he saw the questions forming on their lips.

Estep, holding his hands out a little, as if they pained him, opened his mouth.

Galligan spoke first. He tried to hold the floating, revolving faces fixed for a moment while his dry, thick tongue worked. He had to concentrate hard, to do it.

"Let me tell it like it was," he said. He saw Doc Tolbert in the background, rolling up sleeves, opening his black bag. "This is the way it was," Chip Galligan mumbled. "Jim Estep caught me on flintrock ridge tonight and plain beat hell out of me."

He saw Jim's mouth sag open. For a moment he was afraid Jim was about to say something. Doc Tolbert, who was always a little drunk, was bending down to feel of Chip.

"He plain beat hell out of me," Galligan repeated, eyes closing now, in great drowsiness. "In a clean, fair fight. Then he brought me in to tell you men he never stole my steers—I found the whole bunch of 'em today right in the cedar roughs where they were all the time."

Doc Tolbert said blankly, "Gad, that must have been a fight! Galligan, you're the worst beat-up man I ever saw in my life."

Galligan had one more look at Estep before pain closed his eyes in sleep. For a second, crystal-clear in the fog, he saw the men turn to stare with awe at Jim Estep, saw the little smile of pleasure touch Jim's mouth corners, saw a movement in Jim's shoulders as if they straightened under the prod of the first sense of triumph that had ever come to him.

He thought he saw, too, as he passed out completely, a veiled wink of the big man's eye, as if Jim wanted to say to Chip alone, *Much obliged, neighbor.*

The **DEVIL** *in* **DENVER**



A Ross Ringler Story by George C. Appell

Ringler tries and loses, at love; tries and wins, at dice; demonstrates that it's better to double-cross than to be double-crossed; and finds how pleasant it is to do a good turn.

DAWN had been a gray smear placed with hot rain, but now with daylight the world was drying off and making things more habitable for such men and beasts as had no cover. For the man and the beast poking north toward Denver, to name two.

The man, though tall and long in the bone, was bow-shouldered from the lash of the weather, and he rode with his face down and his pale blue eyes half-closed. His red hair was matted on his neckerchief, for he had not known barbering for many weeks.

He was beat out, was Ross Ringler, and weary of soul. Being broke and hungry over an extended period of time can do that to a man, and he must change his natural habits and adopt others in order to exist. He had recently parted company for a while with an old acquaintance of his, the sort of acquaintance you meet by moonlight so that you can whip your words sideways in soft syllables. Later, he would meet the man again, also by moonlight; but now was not later, and you cannot eat the future.

Ringler's slat-ribbed roan suddenly backed, quartering, nostrils blowing, eyes rolling white, head tossing. He grabbed short rein and snapped up his head and sat straight in his damp saddle. His holster flap had been snugged down against the weather, but now he folded it back and eased his Colt loose. A skittering rabbit can cause a horse to shie with its bouncing white tail—but so can a man in ambush, when the wind veers down from him.

Ross brought his roan together and studied the rolling terrain ahead, eyes switching back and forth, back and forth. There were cottonwoods up there, hazy in the morning heat, and angling out from them was the pewter trace of a stream. It vanished in the lonely sand hills, as if ashamed of its parched banks and the weak trickle of a current that had barely been strengthened by the night's wetness. And then a figure arose this side of the cottonwoods and waved an arm. In the other arm was cradled a rifle.

Ringler kept his right hand on the Colt's hard butt as he approached, for a hand gun is faster than a rifle at short range, and he had the advantage. He stopped twenty feet from the man and nodded gravely.

The man said, "Ridin' through?" He was lean and small and bowlegged, work-slender and with a quiet dignity. His clothing had seen many years of unstored use.

"I am."

The man extended his free hand and stepped forward. "My name's Stebbins."

"Is it?" Ross held his roan head-on to the man, so he wouldn't have to whip a shot cross-body.

Stebbins stopped in his tracks, puzzlement clouding his scamy features. He lowered his hand and said, "I live here."

Ringler's restless eye was taken by a bonnet-bill in the cottonwoods. It was shading the face of a woman who stood in the shade of the boughs, hands on

hips and feet planted wide. She was much larger than Stebbins, and the thought was quick in Ringler: *Why do little studs allus marry big fillies?*

Ross asked, "That your wife?"

Stebbins nodded. "Less some other woman come in durin' the night."

"Kids?" Ross felt a flicker of liking for the man.

"Three. Two tows an' a red."

"A red, huh?" And Ringler permitted his mind to drift a moment into the past and conjure up the image of the ladies he had known. Whenever he saw a redheaded youngster he did that, because you never know. He'd met a Mex kid once who had pale blue eyes and long limbs and a trigger temper, and the conjuration had been fascinating. And now here was this woman, who looked by her stance and withers to be maybe thirty years old, though with a plainswoman it's hard to tell until she laughs. Teeth are the calendar of both women and horses.

Stebbins said, "I seen you comin', but it's so lonesome out here I thought I'd better watch you through my rifle sights awhile."

"Nestin'?"

"Kind of. We made a pitch last month, an' I got a few head down in the draws. I'm fencin' now, an' come next year I might throw into the Drive."

"Well, that's fine." Ringler, homeless since puphood, envied a man with a home. All saddle tramps do, despite their snarling denials. "That's fine."

He was letting the roan pace Stebbins to the cottonwoods, and presently he swung off and touched his hat to Mrs. Stebbins. She was a handsome woman with a humorous mouth and an understanding eye, and you could see that she and Stebbins got along. Loved each other, possibly.

Anna Stebbins was holding this secret deep inside her, for she valued her marriage and she valued her pride. Ross didn't look into her judging eyes, because the last time he had done that had been in a hooded wagon years before. The boss of the Big Butte B had said, "Ringler, take the wagon—better rig a hood, looks stormy—and ride to the railhead for Anna. She's comin' home from Eastern school today." The storm had struck them on the way back and a furious cannonade of thunder had sent them off the seat and under the hood; and wondrous things can occur under canvas when a languid young man is soothing the fears from a frightened young girl—

The redhead was nine or ten, straight in the spine and with his mother's height. The two tows were, like their father, short and yellow-cropped. Anna moved a swing-pot over the cabin fire, and Stebbins produced a canteen of sour mash.

"We ain't got much yet," he said between drinks, "but someday we'll have a nice spread here."

There was poverty in the place, but there also was hope; more hope than poverty, and that takes care of a lot of things.

Stebbins said, "Some days we don't eat enough, but today happens to be all right, an' plenty for you."

"Mighty grateful." Ross wondered what had happened to the Big Butte B brand, that one of its females should come down to this level of living. Went broke, he supposed, as so many of them did. Man ran a good range, then overextended himself—as the bankers call it—and fell on his face. "What do you do, Stebbins—run a credit on stock until the Drive comes through?"

"All I can do is that. Won't see cash money 'til next year, 'less a miracle happens. Right now, three hundred dollars would make all the diff-ho! look't the stew Mamma's got."

They ate at a plank table, and the stew stuck to their ribs, and nobody spoke until Anna asked, "Going to Denver to see Ryan's Show?"

"Not exactly," Ross told her. "I've got other business there."

A girl, for one thing. A kittenlike creature with saucy eyes who had danced for the house down in Palo Duro once. Danced twice a night; and she it was who had snuggled into Ross's lap between turns and wiped whisky from his lips with the hem of her ballet skirt and touched her mouth to his sweating forehead and whispered huskily, "I'm going to Denver soon—if you're ever in Denver—"

Ross offered to help with the dishes, but Anna wouldn't let him.

"You'd better go, if you're heading north."

She was tired, when you stood close to her. Ross could see years of wagon living in her face and in the cords of her neck and in her big knuckles. He had to admit to himself that she must indeed love the West in order to have come back to it from an Eastern school and stayed with it, accepting its raw living and uncertain horizons without flinching.

She smiled at him as she rinsed dishes. "Don't get lost." She didn't laugh, but she didn't have to.

Ross thanked them all. The redheaded boy had fed the roan and reversed the saddle blanket and greased leather, and it was impossible to say thanks for those things.

Ross swung up and circled away from the camp in the cottonwoods, not

looking back. Drifters don't look back, only ahead.

Ahead were the spirals and slopes and frosted peaks that were bastions protecting that lusty young woman of the West called Denver; and Ross Ringler trotted up into her arms one twilight with the body-hunger in him again and his pockets just as empty as before.

He turned his roan into Godbee's Stables and with a stern eye ordered oats. The only light came from a guttering wall lamp, and Godbee could not discern the obvious condition of this tall stranger with the harsh voice. Godbee said, "Yessch"; and watched the stranger depart uphill toward the Brown Palace Hotel.

Ross heard a voice say from alley shadows, "Hi, Stretch."

He whirled.

A bitter laugh came. "See you got here."

"It's you." It was Ross's moonlight acquaintance. "You better behave."

"I will." Spit cracked onto the cobblestones. "You better, too."

Ross resented moonlight acquaintances addressing him in public, and he marched up toward the hotel with anger sputtering in his head. He passed the rear of a brick arena and noted posters advertising *The Greatest Show In the World—Rawhide Jack Ryan & His Globe-Famous Troupe! See Margie May and Her Magic Rope Dance! Watch Col. Ryan Himself Fight The Devil! Thrill To Trick Shooting!*

Ross trudged on, the memory of Margie May large in his mind. A snippet, Margie May, with her saucy eyes and kittenish ways. A tease, a gamin.

Ross reached the Brown Palace and paused at the bright lit entrance with its ornate marquee, hearing the sounds

EIGHT GLANDS CONTROL YOUR DESTINY

and Gland Regeneration is now within your power

MODERN SCIENCE laid its hand on the kernel of all human life—glands.

Through glandular regeneration it opened up new horizons in every human activity. These are the simple facts. All your activities and your physical and mental characteristics, your height, your weight, your temper, depend upon the action of your **EDOCRINE** or **DUCTLESS** glands. These are, in a man, the **THYROID**, **PARATHYROID**, **PITUITARY**, **ADRENAL**, **THYMUS**, **PINEAL**, **PROSTATE**, **ORCHIS**. And, in a woman, **THYROID**, **PARATHYROID**, **PITUITARY**, **ADRENAL** and **OVARIES**. These glands, as well as having independent functions, work together as a system. Their secretions, circulated through your blood stream, dominate all your energies—mental, physical, nervous, and sexual.

A MAN IS AS OLD AS HIS GLANDS

On the strength and the balance of these secretions depends your strength. Your power can be at its height only when your glands are functioning rightly. Weakness is as much the result of ill-balance as of deficiency. But ill-balance or deficiency—it can be cured by **Hormone Therapy**.

DO YOU SUFFER from premature ageing, loss of energy and vitality, weakness, tiredness, sleeplessness, poor appetite, bodily aches and pains, failing eyesight, falling hair, nerves, neurasthenia, brain-fag, nervous digestive disorders, partial or total loss of virile tone? In fact,

are your energies co-ordinated? All these conditions are symptoms of deficiency or bad balance which can only be treated through your glands.

HORMONE THERAPY or **Gland Therapy**, is the science of rejuvenation through the regeneration of the glands. It works on the opposite principle to drugs—it refurnishes, and does not merely stimulate your vital energies. It goes right to the core of physical, mental, nervous or sexual weakness. When the science of **Hormone Therapy** had made possible this astonishing treatment, **British Glandular Products** put on the market glandular compounds for men and women. It has been proved that they give back the fullness of energy which through illness, age or even chronic weakness has been lost.

WHAT IT CAN DO FOR WOMEN

Hormone Therapy has found the cure to many of the functional disturbances which accompany her change of life.

New Life. **British Glandular Products** are here for your benefit. If you recognise in yourself any of the symptoms mentioned above, or, particularly, if you have tried other treatments without success, we know we can help you to new co-ordination and new virility. We know—because we have helped thousands before. Fill in the coupon below and enclose 3d. stamp for booklet, *The "Essence of Life"*.

BRITISH GLANDULAR PRODUCTS

To **British Glandular Products, Ltd.**,
(Z.G.I. 433) 37 Chesham Place, London, S.W.1.

Please send me, without obligation, your booklet, **"ESSENCE OF LIFE,"** for which I enclose 3d. in stamps, postage free, or please send me (a) 100 **"TESTRONES"** Tablets (Male) or (b) 100 **"OVERONES"** Tablets (Female), for which I enclose 15/-
Please strike out tablets not required.

NAME
ADDRESS

of strings inside. Here walked wealth—fur-collared wealth in polished boots; ladies lined with diamonds and men bright with gold. Starched shirtfronts and glittering rings and plump wallets. Assurance and command.

Ross patted his flat pockets, kicked imaginary mud from his wrinkled boots, and marched in. He wanted to see Jack Ryan and ask him one question, though he was fairly sure of the answer. He could not yet present himself to Margie May, for Margie liked her men well-dressed and Ross had not been well-dressed for six months, or since he last had seen her down in Palo Duro.

Colonel Ryan was at the bar, and there was a powerful smell of whisky on him. He was talking—he was always talking—and he was rolling his frosty blue eyes and stroking his neat red imperial and thumping mahogany with a fist like a hoof. Some there were who tarried to listen, but there were not many. Ryan had been in Denver before, and his stories were all thrice-told.

The living shell of a dying legend, Jack Ryan toward the afternoon of his life. A shell kept inflated by bombast and bluster and braggadocio—for a dollar a seat or a drink on you. A plaster hero long since in the musty attic of public opinion, chipped and cracked and hard with resentment.

The colonel drained amber from a twelve-ounce tumbler and held it up to the light. "See that palm, gentlemen?" He waited for someone to nod, and one did. "That is the palm that killed Yellow Hand." He cracked the tumbler to the mahogany and demanded service. "Yellow Hand was nine feet high, and quick as a panther." An eyeroll took in the bar section, paused

briefly on Ringler and returned to the upraised palm.

"He came at me with a knife, from ambush. Nearest white man was California Joe, a mile back with Carrington's column. Not a good man, Carrington. Talked too much." The colonel took a long tug at his drink and flicked fingers along the silver fringes of his blue shell jacket. "Came at me with a knife. Would have spitted and quartered a lesser man. But not Jack Ryan from Kansas's blood-soaked plains!"

Ringler ambled into the bar section from the grill and leaned on the bar. A bartender asked him what he wanted, and he shook his head. He was on Ryan's left, and on Ryan's right was a sallow-faced man with mustaches that dragged at the corners. He was the one who had nodded, who admitted he had seen the colonel's upraised palm.

The colonel continued: "The Yellow Hand fight lasted exactly nine minutes, or as many feet high as that Indian was. First"—Ryan was acting it out, spilling whisky as he did so—"I grabbed onto his knife wrist and broke it. Then I drove a knee into his dinner and threw him. He came at me through the air and I caught his moccasin as he flew past, and busted his leg. Then I broke his neck. He started after me again—"

"After you broke his neck?" It was Ringler.

Ryan swung broad shoulders that way, glowering. And his bull-howl tore through the lower floor of the hotel: "Are you doubting me?"

"No—Yellow Hand's neck."

The sallow man laughed easily and lightly and the colonel swung sharp about.

"What the hell are you laughing at?"

"The anatomical structure of the North American Indian, Colonel."

Ryan emptied his glass. He glared once at the man who had dared to laugh, once at Ringler, and popped his fingers in disdain. "If you doubt me still, you can come to the show and pay a dollar and watch me fight the Devil. Good night and to hell with you."

When he had gone—silver fringes rustling though tarnished, thick thighs swinging and thrusting—the sallow man edged toward Ringler. "Quite a liar, isn't he?"

"I'd judge so, though I've heard better." Ross knew now that he could not ask Ryan the question he had come to ask, for the colonel would not cool down for a long time. Ross had wanted to ask for a job with the show in order to be that much closer to Miss Margie May; but he had suspected what he now knew: that Ryan would refuse.

The sallow man looked Ross up and down. He took a toothpick from a jar and stuck it between his teeth and put his eyes on Ross's and held them there for forty seconds before the toothpick went up and over to the left and he asked, "Looking for work?" His voice was soft.

"Might be."

The man said, "My name's Bohannon."

"So?"

Bohannon smiled. "Not giving, eh?" He signaled the bartender and presently there was whisky between them. "I've got work for a good man."

This was what Ross Ringler had really come to Denver for. He stared back at Bohannon, and the effect was that of one shark gazing at another. "I'm the good man. What's the work?"

Bohannon sipped whisky. "Game watcher."

"What's the game?"

"Faro, roulette, stud, draw, dice. You wander through the crowd and make sure nobody cheats."

"Except the house?"

Bohannon was not insulted. In his business, you could not afford to be insulted. He said, "You'll also shill for the suckers and take a nice win occasionally, to get them playing." He flipped his coat open carelessly and displayed the beaded butt of a revolver on his hip. "But you'll return the win after closing time. You get a hundred a month and ammunition."

Ross sloshed whisky around and around in his glass. "There's quite a high mortality rate in that dodge, isn't there?"

"It depends on the watcher." Bohannon let it go at that.

"Where's your place of amusement?"

"Sixteenth and Larimer." Bohannon finished his drink. "I open my doors in half an hour." He spun two coins across the bar.

Ross mock-saluted. "I'll be there in twenty-nine minutes."

Downhill in darkness away from the Brown Palace, Ross slowed by the shadowed alley and said through his side teeth, "Bohannon's, Sixteenth and Larimer." He paced quickly on, elbows back so that his hand hung to his holster, hat lowered over constantly swiveling eyes. Those were the habits of thirty years of uncertain living, and they were bone-deep in him.

He climbed two flights of rickety stairs and entered the dimly lit room that stretched the length of the building. Tables flanked the long bar and at the end opposite the door was a window. A pomaded young man was running tallow-white fingers over the yellowed keys of a piano.

Bohannon's mirthless smile came and went. "By tomorrow I'll expect you to have a haircut and a clean shirt. Take off your hat."

Because Ross Ringler needed a hundred a month and ammunition, he took off his hat. But he charged the gesture to the account of Bohannon, who would settle the debt someday in a swift flash of knuckles.

The place began to fill up after the theaters closed. The steady murmur of croupiers announced bets won and lost at roulette, the dizzy click of dice was drowned in the curses of losers, and housemen sat riffling cards in anticipation. Glassware came alive to the demands at the bar, and Bohannon smiled and smiled and smiled.

Ross drifted idly past the gaming-tables, noting the methods used by the housemen. Ross had used them himself a score of times in as many cow towns and camps, and he knew faint contempt for these pasty-handed people who had mastered but one facet of their profession. If you would win at dice, you must set one die against the heel of your hand with the required facing up and hold it there with your bent middle finger, meanwhile rattling the other die loosely against it. And then you must roll the loose die and slide the held die so that it rolls over exactly twice on the green and comes up with the required facing on top. Ross had once won a string of steers that way, but he had also once galloped for his life that way.

At the roulette table he knelt to adjust a spur strap, and saw the foot treadle under the carpet which the croupier pressed when he desired the wheel to slow to a stop. At the faro table he noted the back markings of the cards—markings virtually imper-

ceptible, for this room was badly lighted and the whisky was strong. At the bar he watched the bartenders taking a dollar for every five they gave Bohannon.

There was a fight: a customer swung on a baldheaded croupier and the croupier belted the customer with his rake and Ross picked the customer up and swung him so that his flying feet struck the croupier in the chest and knocked him flat. Then he escorted the customer to the door and shoved him toward the stairs.

The croupier picked himself up and murmured to Ross that the last two game watchers had been pitched out the window, dead before they hit the street below. Ross thanked the man for the information, mentally marked a spot on his jaws where a fist might do some good, and lost himself in the crowd.

A man with the clothing and cut of Omaha or—worse—Chicago was hesitating at the dice table. Ross took shill money from the bar and sauntered to the table. "High man rolls."

The houseman gave Ross a die, and they both spun. The customer was watching suspiciously but covetously. Ross had a six, the houseman a two. Ross scooped up the dice and rattled them loosely and let them tumble past the money on the green. It was a seven.

The houseman doubled his bet, and Ross rolled a five.

The customer shook his head. "You'll never make five point."

"Bet?"

"Ten dollars."

Ross threw his shoulder in front of the customer's face as he rolled, in order to catch the houseman's slight headshake. He rolled a three, an eight, then a seven. The houseman picked up

the pot, Ross paid the customer ten dollars side-bet money; and the houseman said, "Step right up, stranger. I'll bet you can win."

Ross ambled away, thumbs in belt, eyes alert. There came a commotion of boots on stairs and the door smashed open and big Rawhide Jack Ryan breezed in, flushed of face and hot of eye. He roared for whisky and a cheer went up—he was still living on the fat of his legend—and he swept off his hat and bowed in all directions. He saw Ross and fixed a blue glare on him and invited him to the bar.

"Doubt my honesty, eh?"

"Not 'tall, Colonel." Ross bought a drink for both.

Ryan was somewhat mollified. "Just finished the show, where I struggle with the Devil. Great closing act."

"You win all the time?"

"It's planned that way. Nothing dishonest about it. Triumph of greatness and godliness over sin. I rope him and drag him, see? The crowd wouldn't have it any other way. Besides, victory is a habit with me." The colonel lipped his glass.

"Very interestin', Colonel. Will you vie with the devil here at these friendly family tables?"

Ryan bowed from his widening waist, his red-veined nose twitching. "I have never refused a challenge in my life. The gauntlet once thrown must be retrieved."

"Dice?"

The customer from Omaha—or Chicago—was making his way toward the door, helpless rage and puzzlement clouding his pouting face. Ryan tugged out a massive wallet and split it with a thumb and slapped down five hundred dollars in bills.

Ross said, "Your play, Colonel. I've made mine an' I'm busted."

The colonel charged into this battle which was, like all battles, based merely upon a difference of opinion and technique. He emerged fifteen minutes later with scorched tail feathers, an empty wallet, a threatening fist, and angry eyes. Ross walked with him to the door, where Ryan wheeled majestically, chin imperial trembling.

"I shall return, for the gods love Rawhide Jack Ryan."

Ross left him, and saw Bohannon's beckoning gesture.

Bohannon said behind his hand, "Who's that little man just came in?"

It was Ross's moonlight-and-alley acquaintance, who should not yet have emerged into a lighted room. "I don't know him."

"He looks like a gunfighter to me. Watch him."

Ross watched him. The gunfighter was nesting his narrow hips against the roulette table, studying the play of the baldheaded croupier. Perspiration sparkled on the croupier's forehead, sprung from his pores by an awareness of danger. He handled his rake clumsily, missed a gather-in of chips and had to make a recount and return three bets. He laid down his rake and placed his fists on his hips and frowned at the gunfighter.

"You want to lay a bet?"

"Might, might not." The gunfighter was looking at the neat piles of cash money in front of the croupier.

"Yes? Or no?"

A big man in a Prince Albert demanded that play be renewed, that it not be held up for short people, here. And he glanced down at the gunfighter contemptuously.

It was starting to happen, it was

happening before Ringler could stop it: the jostle of a gun belt against the flare of a Prince Albert, the flick of a hand to a holster.

Someone shouted and Bohannon drove backward and everyone flattened from the line of fire as shots ripped back and forth along the roulette table. The sound of them washed against the walls and bounced across the room. Two lamps were gone, then a third. Ross leaped like a great cat and landed on the gunfighter and carried him to the floor as the last lamp went out in a tinkle of shattered glass and chinaware.

He got a hammerlock on his quarry and put his mouth to his ear and intoned, "You damned fool—it's not time yet! Tomorrow maybe." And he slung the man toward the door and booted him onto the stairs. Sometimes, you can't trust an acquaintance to contain himself until the time is ripe.

Someone was relighting the lamps, and Bohannon was standing over the man in the Prince Albert, who was sprawled out flat with a derringer in one plump hand.

His fight-fevered eyes were rolling wildly. "I got plenty of life left in me yet, Bohannon."

Bohannon knelt to probe, and the man winced. Bohannon said, "One hole through the short ribs. Nothing serious." He got off his knees and dusted his palms. "I'll take you home. Where's the other?"

Ross said, "He got away. But it wasn't his fault."

Bohannon looked Ross over carefully. He had heard of collusion in his time—one partner working inside a place to case it, the other coming in to make the snatch—and he didn't like the taste of the word. Quietly he asked, "How come?"

"This man"—pointing downward—"drew first."

The man on the floor started to sit up. "That's a damn lie!"

Bohannon snapped impatient fingers. "Let's get him out of here. I'm closing for the night." When you have trouble, in that business, you don't advertise it or prolong it.

Ross stood thumbing the shill money remaining in his pocket, trying not to grin. He asked for a drink, drank it, and followed Bohannon and the wounded man out.

Morning was a painful wash of yellow light piercing the fly-specked window of the flophouse dormitory which was Ross's hotel. He rolled off the moldy straw pallet and quickly patted his pockets and, satisfied that he had not been robbed, addressed himself to the wash trough. Washed, he descended to the office cubby, retrieved his gun and belt, and stepped into the sunshine. He took breakfast off the tailgate of a wagon that was advertised as *Denver's Only Store That Comes To You*, then proceeded uphill toward the brick arena where Ryan had his show.

He loitered there for almost two hours before she appeared from the direction of the Brown Palace. She was not the type who should rise early and expose herself to bright light, Margie May; she was of the night, of lamplit places and shadows.

She was as pretty now as she ever would be, in her fur toque and hem-slitted walking-skirt with circular ruffles. She opened her parasol against the beat of the sun and twirled it once or twice, maintaining on her lips the faint smile she believed was a true imitation of Mona Lisa's.

Ross bowed to her with the grace of

a steer caught on a stile and whipped off his hat and as quickly put it on again, conscious of his unshorn hair. "I'm here."

She tipped her face at him. "Oh? Oh—it's you." She stopped twirling the parasol, and distaste was on her mouth. She wanted to rise in the world, not go down. "Are you traveling through?"

Palo Duro was a long way away, all of a sudden. "I'm beginnin' to think so."

She said, "I hope you'll come to the show tonight. I'm the star—of course."

He said nothing in the most eloquent way. It came to him that she was waiting for somebody on this street corner; and presently that somebody marched into view with boots glimmering like oiled glass, shirt crisp, and twenty-dollar Stetson brushed. His young face was frowning as he looked at Ross.

"Friend of yours, Margie?" When he reached for her elbow, his coat opened to show a polished star on his weskit.

"An acquaintance only, a devil in disguise. Mr. Ringler, Marshal Cooley."

The marshal said, "You're Bohannon's shot gun, no? Well, you better get out of Denver. We don't approve of Bohannon here. A leading citizen was wounded there last night."

"If he was a leading citizen, what was he doin' in Bohannon's?"

Cooley sniffed loftily and started to lead Margie May away when clapping hoofs and screaming wheels and the whack of a whip made them jump back to the curb.

Redbearded Jack Ryan braked his rig to a sudden stop and doffed a pearl-hued Stetson to Margie May and bade her get in. "You're late now for rehearsal, filly. So hop!"

She hopped, and the colonel snaked an arm around her shoulders as he

whipped up his team and drove off toward the rear of the arena.

Ross spat out his cigarette and winked at Cooley. "Maybe you're orderin' the wrong man out of town, Marshal. What you need is a deputy." From the tail of his eye, he saw his gunfighting acquaintance slip past the posters by the stage entrance and go downhill. "Me, for instance."

A sickness of soul was entering Ross Ringler, and he needed a remedy. He had decided that suddenly, as he decided all things; and now he must execute it. He was sick of collusion with a man who would double-cross him for a dime and he was sick of showcase bluster with wagging goatees under it and he was sick of the constant dread of poverty—though not for himself.

"You?" Cooley sniffed again. But he was interested. "Why you?"

"I work for Bohannon, don't I?" Ross's next wink was a brief lid-snap, "You want evidence of crooked play don't you? You can't get into that place alone, can you?"

Orlando Cooley was an eager young man who wanted to be governor before he was thirty. If he could clean up Denver, no matter with whose help (a gunfighter in disguise was rumored to be in town) the electorate might—"What do you get out of this?" Cooley, too, was sick of gamblers and showcase westerners, and fear of losing his badge.

"A clean conscience, I guess. One with a few spots removed, anyway. Well?"

"How do I know—"

"That I won't tip my mitt to Bohannon for a reward? 'Cause I desire to leave town cleaner than I came into it, that's why."

Orlando Cooley met him halfway:

"Performance is proof, Mr. Ringler. I'll watch your performance."

"It'll be better'n Ryan's when it comes. And now I think I'll take a slow look at this rehearsal, from a place where I can't be seen."

Night had been down on Denver for two hours when Ross reported for work at Bohannon's with a barbered head and a clean shirt. He hung his hat on a wall peg and approached Bohannon.

"That gunfighter last night—what if he returns?"

"Let him play, take his roll, throw him out." Bohannon drew brightly on his cigar. "I want you to return last night's shill money. I can't do business my way if the help is crooked."

"Bohannon, the last man called me crooked lies at the bottom of the Colorado River, a heap of fish-picked bones."

For a tense moment they stared coldly into each other's luminous eyes; and then the gunfighter himself sauntered in and took Bohannon's arm and led him away. Ross went to the dice table—his favorite—and proceeded to demonstrate to a pompous customer how easy it was to win. Ross made his point, doubled, and rolled again. The houseman tried to signal him to back off, but he demanded a redouble, rolled for five hundred and made it. He tucked the hundred-dollar notes into his pocket.

"See how simple it is!"

A finger tapped his elbow and he turned slowly. Bohannon was six inches from him. "Come on over to the corner by the piano, where no one can hear us." In the corner Bohannon said, "I've just been told you're a deputy marshal, courtesy of Mr. Cooley."

A hard something was pressing into

Ross's kidneys. It was the muzzle of the gunfighter's weapon. The man whispered, "I always thought you'd turn, Ringler. I heard you this mornin', by the arena."

Bohannon said, "Give me that five hundred you parlayed off the dice table."

The window at the end of the room was open, and Bohannon saw the direction of Ross's glance. He said, "It's a long way down to the street."

Ross laughed lightly. "Me argue?" He snagged a hand backward and crushed the gunfighter's thin wrist and caught the man's weapon and in one continuous motion brought its butt up into Bohannon's jaws. He stopped the gunfighter's scream with a savage backhand that tore the man's face open from nostrils to chin and left him on the carpet drooling crimson.

Croupiers and bartenders were soft-stepping his way in line-of-skirmishers that was a closing crescent blocking off the door. The baldheaded croupier had a .31-30 in his hand and he was cocking it.

Ross saw Bohannon's eyes open, saw him swallow and touch his jaws tenderly. Ross, a stickler for form, said, "Good night, Mr. Bohannon"; hurdled the dice table and knocked the houseman off his chair and dodged toward the window. He poised an instant on its ledge, shouted "I'll be back for my hot!" and dropped downward with fingers hooked onto the outer sill.

There was a hip roof two man-lengths below him and he thrashed his legs for side motion, swung sideways, and let go. He struck sun-softened tarpaper, crabbed around and ran away from Bohannon's window even as three shots rapped smartly into the hip roof and splattered splinters into

his back. He dropped into Sixteenth Street and trotted up to the brick arena and dove into the stage entrance.

The doorman stopped him and he blurted, "Deputy for Cooley," and followed dim-globed corridor lights to the dressing-rooms. Up in the arena, Ryan's stentorian tones were proclaiming, "The world's greatest fight—by the worr-ld's greatest fighters—myself!—and the Devil!" Music crashed and hoofs thudded overhead and there was a swelling cacophony of applause.

Bohannon's voice rasped, "He came in here, doorman, and I'm going to find him!"

Ross ducked into a sooty cubicle and was face-to-face with a tall man who at the morning's rehearsal had been the Devil. He was about to step into a red cotton devil's suit, on the hood of which was a mask with cloth horn extruding from it. Ross wasted no time.

"Mister, for a hundred-dollar bill let me go to hell tonight. You've lost long enough."

Before the man could say anything Ross thrust a bill at him and plunged his own long legs into the red suit. It stretched woefully and it came apart in two places and the sleeves were too short. Ross lowered the mask over his face and jumped into the corridor and collided with a panting Bohannon.

The gambler muttered, "Excuse me," and plunged on toward the stairs leading to the arena, one hand under his coat where his gun was.

Ross raced after him and up to the darkened wings and took a strawberry roan from a nervous hostler who gasped, "You're late!" The new Devil cantered into the white brilliance of the arena and a monstrous cheer went up and Ryan waved his pearl-hued hat and

pranced his white horse and slowly uncoiled a grass rope. The music crashed to a stop.

Ryan stabbed spurs and galloped across the ring with rope spinning faster and faster. There was to be some by-play now, some feinting and lunging before the final unseating of the gentleman from hell. Ross found a stiff riata on his saddle hook and he shook it out and circled away on the forehand and quartered in toward the advancing Ryan. The colonel's greased rope snaked swiftly out and the crowd roared expectantly.

Ross bent away from the hissing loop and lashed out with the riata and caught Ryan neatly and cleanly around the shoulders and snapped him off his ornate saddle and dumped him into the trampled sawdust.

The music came alive with discordant surprise and Ross dragged the shocked and surprised colonel to ring-side and flipped the riata's end to Margie May and cried, "Here's your hero—you better take Cooley after all!" Cooley's face was behind her as she stood in her ballet skirt and Ross waved gaily. "Follow me, boy, an' I'll show you some evidence."

He recrossed the ring at the gallop and spotted Bohannon by an exit and shouted, "Catch up the colonel's horse! Your game watcher's gone back to rob the whole place!"

There are men still living who remember that night in Denver, when the Devil cantered downhill followed by the marshal (later governor) with a ballet dancer bouncing behind him with her slim arms caught around his waist. The Devil, it is related, reached Sixteenth and Larimer first and vanished upstairs, and was never seen

again. The marshal and the dancer went up next, and then Bohannon himself appeared on a white horse and threw himself upstairs, not knowing in his haste who or what was waiting for him. There came the sharp, final sounds of knucklebone on jawbone; and there was the spectacle of a bald-headed croupier flying out the window with his rake still in hand. Then a tall man with barbered red hair and a clean shirt emerged on the street and turned down toward Godbee's Stables, hat lowered over his eyes, whistling happily to himself.

Ross Ringler was whistling because he knew it was better to turn a dollar this way than to collude with a gun' fighter who would double-cross him anyway; and that it was better to double-cross a man like that gunfighter before the man double-crossed him.

He raised Stebbins's camp toward evening next day and drew in only to chat a moment. He nodded solemnly to the sapling redhead and reminded Stebbins that a son is the only true immortality a man ever has, and to take care of him.

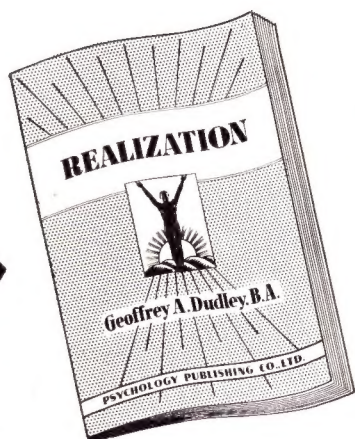
Anna Stebbins asked, "How was the Ryan Show?"

"Wild West, ma'am, Wild West!" And Ross peeled off three hundred of his remaining four hundred dollars and told them, "I won this for you from the colonel himself—'til the Drive comes past." He was gone before Stebbins could count the money.

He was gone in a scatter of pebbles and a flare of dust, like a ghost who had never really materialized at all. He disappeared in the twilight, richer in many ways than he had ever been in his life before.



"He always gets stage fright before the snake dance!"



It's Almost
UNCANNY

**What this book
Can Do for You!
Test its Amazing Powers
ABSOLUTELY FREE**

What is the peculiar influence of this strange book? Whence comes this almost uncanny power to help raise the sick to glowing vibrant health—the timid to a new self-confident personality, the unsuccessful to positions of eminence and importance?

It does seem queer. Yet timid, colourless people simply read this book—and constantly gain courage that performs seeming miracles. Downhearted, frustrated people scan its pages—and quickly begin to overcome their handicaps. Men and women from every walk of life glimpse its mighty message—and feel a new giant power surging within them—an irresistible force leading them to undreamed-of success.

SECRET REVEALED

A strange book! A book that seems to cast a spell over every person who turns its pages! And yet there is positively nothing queer—bizarre about its results. The whole secret lies in this simple fact; everyone has sleeping within himself tremendous unused energy—extraordinary personal powers capable of astonishing development.

All you need do is to release these dormant potentialities—then make them ready to do your bidding.

IMMEDIATE EFFECT

And that is exactly what this singular book enables you to do. It shows you how to tap this vast storehouse of the power within. It explains how to release your own vital power—magnify it—how to harness it for practical use. The effect is almost immediate. Self-consciousness changes to confidence, timidity gives way to courage. Humility retreats before self-reliance. You gain poise that commands attention. Charm that makes you irresistible. Popular personal assurance that reveals you to be a dynamic personality that attracts friends, business opportunities, wherever you go.

**EXAMINE THIS AMAZING
BOOK**

Let it definitely influence your own personality. Send to-day for a free copy of this inspiring message entitled "REALIZATION".

PSYCHOLOGY PUBLISHING CO., LTD.

(Dept. GRE/RI.) Psychology House, Marple, Cheshire.

In This Issue

ROGUE RIVER FEUD by Zane Grey

(Magazine Abridgment)

A powerful novel of salmon fishers and gold seekers in the rugged Pacific Northwest. Returned from the war in which he has been partially disabled, Kev Bell fights to rebuild his shattered life and defeat the unscrupulous plans of powerful and greedy men. He partners up with a tough old riverman to buck the salmon-packing monopoly. Violence flares and the monopoly's agents crack down on the independent fishermen. The partners lose their boat and Kev flees for his life. Beryl, a provocative wilderness girl, gives him refuge. Kev, framed for murder, fights back desperately. The turbulent Rogue River makes a colorful natural background for one of Zane Grey's best stories.

THE DEVIL IN DENVER by George C. Appell

A Ross Ringler fun-and-action novelette. Ringler visits the mile-high city to see a gorgeous gal, but what he finds is mainly strife as he joins battle with the agents of sin, using the law and the devil as strange-bedfellow allies!

THE SILVER SADDLE by Thomas Thompson

Monte Clovis comes to Prairie Lea to settle an old score, but it turns out that he has to settle his own future, and that of a wide-eyed innocent.

POINTMENT FOR MANGAS by Verne Athanas

The Apache chief lived to kill white men, and it looked as if the giant redskin was set to live high that day. . . .

—and other exciting Old West features, including a true longrider story by Harold Preece.

ZANE GREY'S WESTERN MAGAZINE ★ No. 17

WDL ZANE GREY'S WESTERN

MAGAZINE

A Zane Grey Novel **ROGUE RIVER FEUD**

(Magazine Abridgment)

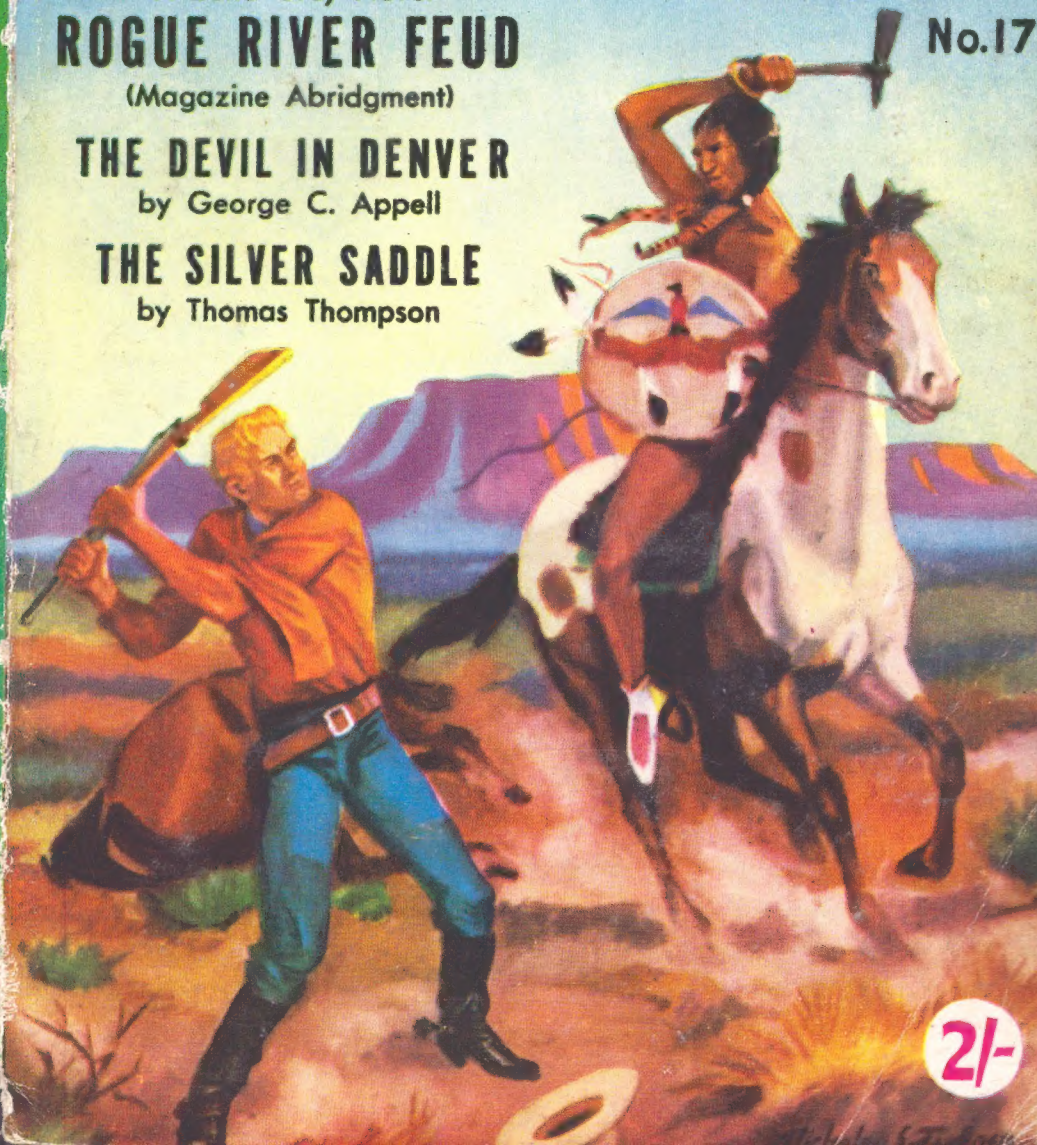
THE DEVIL IN DENVER

by George C. Appell

THE SILVER SADDLE

by Thomas Thompson

No. 17



2/-